

## 2010 Second Place Winner

### Is My Community Honey Bee-Friendly? By Sean Huss, 15, Spencer, Indiana

The definition of honey bee friendly community is one that: (1) does not discourage beekeeping and has no legal restrictions to keeping bees, (2) contains good bee habitat—a diverse range of native plants and wildflowers, and cultivated crops, fruits and vegetables that can be used by the bees as sources of nectar and pollen, (3) has people who care about the environment and limit their use of pesticides, and (4) has good sources of help and education for farmers and beekeepers. [1, 2] According to this definition I believe that my community is honey bee friendly and I will tell you why.

My community is Owen County in Southwestern Indiana; it is mainly rural with a population of less than 23,000 people, and has no planning or zoning laws that prohibit beekeeping. [3,4] Based on United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service and Owen County Soil and Water Conservation District 2007-2008 statistics the county land is divided into 19% crop land, 63% forested land, 14% pasture land, and only 4% of the land is developed. County farms are small averaging only 154 acres in size. Cattle and hogs are the main livestock in Owen County. The major crops are corn, soybeans, hay, and wheat and only small amount of insecticides are used by farmers. [5, 6, 7] There are 14 farms with honey bee colonies. [8] Our forest lands contain a variety of native trees species which are used as nectar and pollen sources for honey bees, including basswood, black locust, willow, maples, and wild cherry. There are many uncultivated pastures that contain a variety of native wildflowers and shrubs which bloom throughout the season that are used by honey bees including dandelion, asters, vetch, mustards, ragweed, goldenrod, milkweed, morning glory, sumac, sunflowers, and wild black and raspberries. [9] In addition to privately owned land there are 10,000 acres of land as state park, forest, and recreation area that provide native plants for bees. [10]

Owen County is part of a larger community that includes Monroe and Greene counties and the City of Bloomington. [11] Bloomington has joined the growing national locavore movement which advises people to eat locally produced food as a way to be more environmentally conscious and support local agriculture. [12, 13] The community has a Local Grower's Guild which runs a cooperative made up of farmers, grocery stores, restaurants, and local citizens interested in locally grown sustainably produced fruits, vegetables, honey, meats, milk, and eggs. [14, 15, 16] The City of Bloomington runs the Bloomington Community Farmers' Market [17] that allows local farmers to sell their products directly to the consumer. There are several farmers who live in Owen County that sell their produce at the farmers' market. This is good for farmers and consumers, and also for honey bees as it encourages the farmers to produce the organic fruit and vegetable crops the consumer wants. This help honey bees because organic produce doesn't contain pesticides. [18]

People interested in beekeeping can find many sources of information and help in my community and state. Large-scale honey producers like Hunter's Honey Farm, Hoosier Honey, and Graham's Bee Works with years of experience have always been

willing to answer questions and supply startup nucleus colonies for us. [19, 20, 21] Indiana has two beekeeping organizations, the Indiana Beekeeping Association and the Indiana State Beekeepers Association that provide information. [22, 23] Each year the Heartland Apiculture Society sponsors a Midwest beekeeping meeting. [24] I have attended this meeting and it was a great learning experience. Each winter the Indiana State Beekeepers Association sponsors a beekeeping school for beginning beekeepers. [25] My father took this course when he first got started in beekeeping. He got a lot of hands on experience in the course and met a lot of experienced beekeepers. Indiana State Apiary Inspector Kathleen Prough, The Purdue Bee Hive Website, the local extension agent Jenna Smith, and beekeeping extension publications provide beekeepers with information on honey bee research and provide farmers and homeowners with ways to prevent bee poisoning with pesticides. [26, 27, 28, 29] In addition people can learn about the importance of beekeeping in agriculture from local students involved in beekeeping 4-H projects and Owen Valley FFA programs. [30] My FFA group sponsors an annual Agriculture Day in October for all county 4th graders. This program teaches students about agriculture and its importance in our lives. The topics we teach are livestock, meat judging, crops, soils, and beekeeping. For the past 2 years I have taught the Beekeeping part.

In conclusion I believe my community is honey bee friendly but there is always more we can do. People in my community have heard that honey bees are dying and that CCD (Colony Collapse Disorder) is the cause. The news articles make the problem seem like it only affects farmers, and make it sound like only scientists can help. [31] Most people that I talk to want to help but don't know what they can do. The most recent research released by the USDA indicates scientists believe that a combination of viruses, diseases, parasites, poor nutrition, and pesticides together may be the cause of CCD. [32] Beekeepers and scientists should prepare newspaper articles, posters and handouts to provide people with the latest news and include specific ways everyone can help. Two examples of things anyone can do are limiting their use of pesticides and by planting trees and shrubs around their homes that can be used by honey bees for food. [33] Farmers can be encouraged to leave fence rows between crop field and pasture areas to grow wild flowers and to harvest hay fields after they have finished blooming to provide honey bee food. Local governments and schools can be encouraged to replace grass areas along roadways with fields of wildflowers for honey bee. [34] I'm sure there is even more that we can do to be more honey bee friendly.

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#### Additional Resources

Personal interview with Lee Huss (Urban Forester for the City of Bloomington Department of Parks and Recreation, Bloomington, Indiana, Tree Farmer, and

beekeeper) about local trees and plants used by honey bees, sources of help and education for Indiana beekeepers, and City of Bloomington Farmers' Market.  
Personal interview with Karen Huss (Agricultural Scientist) about Owen County agriculture statistics, and local and sustainable agriculture organizations and farming techniques.