

2010 Third Place Winner (tied)

Is My Community Honey Bee Friendly? By Abby Lyons, 10, Dwight, Nebraska

My name is Abby Lyons. I am ten years old and have been a beekeeper for two years. This is my third year. In all this time I have only found friendliness toward my bees in all levels: state, county, community, and next-door neighbors.

I feel that it is important to have the honey bee as our Nebraska state insect because the honey bee is very unique. The honey bee has been our state insect since 1975. [1]

At the state level the Nebraska Department of Roads has a program where they plant flowers, grasses and legumes along the roads. Many of these are flowering plants that bees like to visit. Some of these plants are Goldenrod, Vetch, Bird's Foot Trefoil and Clover. [2] These plants are in the areas that my bees visit, which is beneficial.

The state also has a program called the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). CRP is a program where farmers are paid to plant the land to grass in order to conserve the land. CRP is mostly grass, but my grandpa's is 20% alfalfa and sweet clover. The bees will use alfalfa and sweet clover to make their honey. CRP is honey bee friendly because when it is established it is not sprayed. One of the main controls is to burn it and after that the clover comes back very strong. My bees are in an area where there is a lot of CRP. The clover is very plentiful where my bees are. [3]

My state, Nebraska has a group called the Nebraska Beekeepers Association who is dedicated to helping beekeepers take care of their honey bees. They have been giving workshops for years. They have workshops for beginner beekeepers and for master beekeepers. I have benefited from these workshops. I learned much of what I know from these workshops. The Nebraska Beekeepers Association gives out approximately six scholarships every year. The scholarships provide you with a hive, the bees, your equipment, and a mentor who helps you along the way. The Nebraska Beekeepers Association also has some things you can buy such as bee trading cards, which you can use for classroom uses.

The Nebraska Beekeepers Association also helps out with something we all know as the Nebraska State Fair. The Nebraska Beekeepers Association sells honey ice cream, honey taffy, comb honey samples, and honey straws. They also have hives with glass windows so they can show you what the queen, drones, workers, and comb look like. They also have a hive outside so they can give presentations and answer your questions about honey bees.

At the county level we have the Butler County Fair. I have talked to the 4-H Council and the Butler County Fair Board and got them to add some beekeeping projects to our county fair. I always take some projects to the fair under beekeeping. Last year I was the only one who took anything and I won the beekeeping trophy. This year my brother, Andy, will take some projects under beekeeping.

The Butler County Extension Agent called me twice about local residents who had swarms. The residents wanted the bees removed, but wanted the bees to survive. I went and got a swarm from Brainard and it survived.

At the community level, I have given many talks to people. My 4-H club asked me to give a presentation and I gave two talks to persuade the 4-H Council and the Butler County Fair Board to add the projects to the fair.

At the next door neighbor level, my neighbor Ryan Pekarek has a five acre garden where he produces vegetables that he sells at the farmer's markets. I have three hives of honey bees on the edge of his garden. Ryan made his garden "bee friendly" by keeping "brush and weeds mowed down in front of the hives to allow the bees easy access out to the fields. Short growing crops were planted in front of the hives." Ryan only applied pesticides when plants were not flowering or being visited by bees. He had only a few cucumber beetles and squash bugs on his vine crops, so my bees were not bothered by insecticides, as they were not needed. Ryan looks at the bee toxicity on insecticides. "There are insecticides that are "soft" on bees but "hard on bad insects. This same idea applies to spiders, ladybugs, bees, and lacewings—all beneficial to the fields and crops." Ryan feels like it is beneficial to have my bees in his garden because they "increase the yields of vine crops," and the quality of the crops is better—more fruit, better shaped cukes and pumpkins, better flavor." Ryan's customers find it interesting that he has another farmer's hives on his fields. [4]

The local aerial plane sprayer asked me where my bees were located so he would not spray them. I plan to make him and the local co-op maps so they will know where my hives are located.

I think my neighborhood, community, county, and state are the friendliest around. I am honored to be working with them to be "bee friendly" and help the honey bee thrive.

Endnotes:

1. Nebraska Legislature (2008-2010). 2008-2009 Nebraska Blue Book (online edition). <http://nebraskalegislature.gov/about/blue-book/php>.
2. Nebraska Department of Roads. (2009) Discover Nebraska's Roadside Flowers and Grasses [Brochure].
3. D. Norman Andrews (personal interview) Feb. 10, 2010.
4. Ryan Pekarek (email interview) Feb. 10, 2010