

INTERVIEW WITH OUR *Bee Keepers*

The Zitlaw brothers own and manage the hives that we use to help pollinate the almonds we are selling to you, the consumer! Please enjoy getting to know Greg Zitlaw and gaining the knowledge he shares about BEES!

Why are you a beekeeper and how did you get started?

I am a beekeeper because I sincerely enjoy working with bees. They are fascinating insects both as individual insects and as a colony. My brother and I started the business in 2007 wanting to get back into working a profession that was agriculture related. We grew up on an almond orchard and our family has had small almonds orchards for four generations. We felt that beekeeping would be a great way to get back into it.



How many hives do you have?

We have 300 hives.

Do you move your hives around?

We do move our hives from "outyards" for almond pollination in January, than back to the yards where they remain until the next season of pollination.

What is the scope of your work?

We have hives near Red Bluff, Corning, Orland, Dayton and Paskenta. We keep bees for orchard pollination and queen bee sales.

How do you maintain your hives? What's required?

Hives are maintained when no nectar or pollen is available by supplemental feeding of corn syrup and pollen substitutes fed in patty form. Supplemental feeding is required after almond, prune, orange and blackberry bloom are finished where we keep our bees. Spring and fall mite treatments are required and treatment for other diseases takes place in the fall and winter as well.



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What are the most interesting things about bees to you?

It is very difficult to isolate the most interesting thing about bees because there are so many aspects of how bees are that are fascinating. The simple fact that 30,000 individual bees can work together in such unity and harmony to carry out the day to day activities the colony needs is one of the things that amazes me the most.

What are the Different 'bees' in a colony?

The different bees are the drones (males), the worker bees and queen bees.

What's a bee's lifespan?

Drones live for eight or more weeks, queen bees can live up to several years, and worker bees live from four to six weeks. Most commercial beekeepers replace queens every year to ensure the colony's numbers are maintained at high levels as younger queens tend to lay more eggs than aging queens.



What's the most rewarding thing about being a bee-keeper?

The most rewarding thing about being a beekeeper is seeing the end products of queen rearing efforts. To be able to work with the bees in every step of the development of queen bees is very fascinating.

What's the biggest struggle?

The biggest struggle with beekeeping is controlling a bee pest called varroa. It is a mite that feeds off of the bee's hemolymph (bee blood), weakening the bee and causing it to die prematurely. This causes the colony population to dwindle and if not caught soon enough, the colony will die as bees are dying at a quicker rate than they are being replaced. Varroa mites carry several viruses that further weaken bees as well.

Anything else you'd like to share with consumers about your profession/bees?

Don't be afraid of bees. They are so busy doing their job that they will ignore you if you simply observe them and appreciate them for the industrious and fascinating insect that they are.