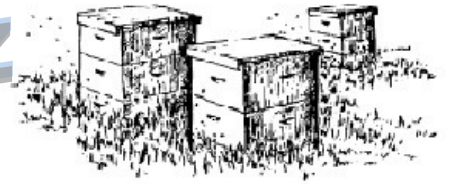




Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping



September, 2018

The September 11, 2018 meeting of the Fort Bend Beekeepers will be held at 7:00 pm in Fort Bend County's "Bud" O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Rd., Rosenberg, Texas. The main agenda item in September is judging entries in our hive painting and photo contests. Visitors (and new members) are always welcome. Membership dues are \$5.00 for the calendar year. The Association provides coffee and lemonade for meeting refreshments if someone will volunteer to make it and clean up afterwards. It is important that we leave the Community Center the way we found it! Please lend a hand in straightening up the tables and chairs and cleaning up the refreshment area. We will be called to order at 7:30 after 30 minutes of social time. Don't forget about the *letgo* table in the back of the room. You may find just what you need or get rid of stuff (beekeeping treasures) that needs a new home. We had a real pile back there in August!

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

Here is this month's Q (from one of our members) and an A:

Q: I want someone to keep bees on my property so that I can lower my property taxes. Can you help me with this?

An A: We'll assume that you have been reading about the "beekeeping" exemption after discovering that property taxes on rural property can be really high. If you need more information, the Texas Beekeepers Association web site (<https://texasbeekeepers.org/>) has links for you. You are encouraged to talk to your appraisal district as well.

This answer will go beyond the mechanics of this exemption and it may seem to be a little controversial:

Property taxes are "ad valorem", Latin meaning "based on value": taxes are assessed annually as a percentage of the taxable value of the property (typically about 2% in our area). The state of Texas does not have any property taxes, but the Texas legislature authorizes taxing authorities like county government, school districts, utility districts (e. g. water and sewage treatment) or various districts serving some specific purpose (emergency services, flood control, etc.). The legislature is also prone to affording special tax breaks here and there. Have you signed up for your homestead exemption? Are you now over 65?

The tax rate (or "millage") usually changes little from year to year, but tax collections go up as the total of appraised values in the county increase due to inflation and growth. Your tax bill goes up while politicians rave about holding the line on taxes (the tax rate or millage).

Taxable value is set by county appraisal districts that are independent of the taxing authorities. A citizen board (Appraisal Review Board or ARB) settles disagreements over taxable value between the appraisal district and the property owner. Your tax payment is collected by the tax assessor-collector, but the actual property tax rates are set by the local taxing unit and assessed based on appraised value.

Property taxes are like telling a kid to "go ask your mother": one party doles out preferential treatment, one party determines the taxable value of your property, another sets the tax rate, and a third one sends the bill and collects your money (or forecloses on your property). Do you begin to feel waltzed around the dance floor?

It is important to understand that this is "zero sum": if your taxes are lower, someone else picks up the shortfall. It may even be you with the taxes on your home. The system struggles to be fair and equitable since if your property is of similar value as your neighbor's, you should be paying the same in prop-

erty taxes. It is clearly evident that the system is flawed since your annual appraisal shows up in the mailbox along with various offers to protest your property's taxable value for you (for a cut of the tax savings).

The "beekeeping" exemption is unlike other open space appraised value since "beekeeping" is an activity. (And beekeepers know how difficult that can be.) "Ranching" is an activity, "pasture land" valuation for property taxes is not. Ditto for "farming" and "cropland". If this exemption is granted and the activity (beekeeping) fails, five years of rollback taxes come due since an "exemption" is actually an IOU for any taxes not paid over the previous five years. The bill comes due when the property loses its exemption. Further, property cannot return to the lower valuation for five years.

The numbers can be scary. The tax bill at market value on 10 acres (valued at say \$500,000) would be \$10,000 per year. "Beekeeping" reduces the tax bill to \$264. That is \$9,736 less to pay for schools, roads, public safety, flood control, etc. Rollback taxes would be $5 \times \$9,736 = \$48,630$.

If your intent is to pursue the "beekeeping" exemption you had best do your homework and plan to engage in this "activity" since if it fails (or the beekeeper just goes away) you would be on the hook for tens of thousands in rollback taxes.

August Meeting Notes

We had 56 members and guests sign in at our August meeting (oops...we forgot to do a head count to verify the sign-in sheets). Thanks for signing in. (Our sign-in sheets are an important record of our use of county facilities.)

After 30 minutes of social time, President Jack Richardson opened the meeting with an invocation and then led us in the Pledge of Allegiance. Jack welcomed seven visitors and asked them to introduce themselves. Jack then gave a quick rundown on the club, our mentoring program, and the fun *letgo* table in the back of the room.

Secretary-Treasurer Lynne Jones spoke about the Brazos Valley Beekeeper Association's Beekeeping School coming up in September in College Station. It is a well-run event with sessions for all experience levels. Our club was provided with a free registration to the school to use as a door prize tonight. It can only be claimed by a club member. Lynne also passed out the rules for our September contests (see below):

Fort Bend Beekeepers Association
Hive Painting and Photo Contest Rules

1. Hive box and/or photos must be present, in-person at the September 11, 2018 FBBA Meeting.
2. Contest is open to FBBA members and their immediate family.
3. Hive boxes must be painted by the entrant. Photos must have been taken by the entrant.

Hive Painting Specifics

1. You only have to paint a hive box (any size). You do not have to include a top or bottom.
2. 3 winners will be voted on by club members present at the meeting. There will be ribbons awarded for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place. Winning hive boxes will be featured on the club Facebook page and website.
3. Entries are the property of the entrant. The club will not keep any of the hive boxes.

Photo Entry Specifics

1. The theme will be "Our Glorious Honey Bee." Photos should include some element of honey bee behavior, science, history, or any aspect of beekeeping that contains a honey bee in the photo.
2. Entries must be no larger than 8"x10"
3. 3 winners will be voted on by club members present at the meeting. There will be ribbons awarded for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place. Winning photos will be featured on the club Facebook page and website.

Next, Jack opened the floor for discussion of any topics of interest. James Caraway mentioned that he has used The Fat Beeman's fogging recipe for varroa mite treatment ("Don The Fat Bee Man" Kuchenmeister has been keeping bees for over 50 years and has a popular YouTube channel). Jeff McMullan discussed foggers that use oxalic acid

and were recently labeled for varroa treatments.

Varroa are present in virtually all hives, either feeding on adult bees ("phoretic" mites) or reproducing on pupae in capped cells. Any mite control requires two treatments to kill those that were protected under capped brood from the first one.

Varroa infestation can be determined several ways. Mite drop through with a screened bottom board onto a count board covered with oil (cooking spray works good). The number of mites you count after 24 hours is a relative measure of mite presence. The "powdered sugar roll" using 1/2 cup of bees (some 300 bees) gives a more quantitative measure of the percent infestation. The most accurate method is an alcohol (or soap) wash. It kills the bees so they can be counted and an accurate measure determined. A sample greater than 3% is cause for concern and mite treatment is in order.

Varroa prefer drone brood because it takes longer to emerge and drone pupae are more hardy than the smaller worker brood. Often drone pupae in capped cells are broken open when you are inspecting your hive. Always inspect them for mahogany-colored varroa. Opening a few drone brood cells for inspection is probably a good idea too.

Lynne Jones commented that the Honey Bee Health Coalition had just published an updated "Tools for Varroa Management Guide". The guide goes over varroa counts and treatment options. <https://honeybeehealthcoalition.org/varroa/>.

Ian Kjos spoke about a swarm he collected in April. The colony is very healthy, seems resistant to beetles and has been very good honey producer. Ian is on our Swarm List and when it was reported to the club, the info was relayed to him.

Laura Parnell shared details of an interesting experience she had recently. A swarm of bees nearby all took flight and began to travel to

their newly-chosen location. She said it was a buzzing cloud of bees moving like a horizontal tornado.

Ed Veiseh had an ongoing problem with bees that kept coming to a front porch, so he finally put a swarm trap there and they quickly moved inside.

Michael McLean humorously pointed out that catching swarms and keeping swarms are two different stories.

Swarms have built hives under the parent hive's bottom board, in barbecue pits, and sometimes in very unsuitable locations (too hot come July, too small, etc.)

Thanks to the donors and congrats to the winners of our door prize drawings. Ed Veiseh was the winner of the BVBA School free registration.

Treasurer's Report

The treasury balance reported last month was \$3,632.22. The total is correct but the reported amounts in checking and cash (for change) should have been \$3,572.22 and \$60.00 (a \$5.00 boo-boo). Since our August report we collected \$30 in dues and spent \$149.87 on seven copies of The Beekeepers Handbook for our mentoring program. The resulting balance is \$3,512.35, consisting of \$3,452.35 in our Wells Fargo checking account plus \$60.00 in cash to make change.

**TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
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