

AGRICULTURE - - Honey Pot Apiary

Joe Hirmer, 658 No. 6 Road,
Richmond, B.C.

Interviewed: February 15, 1973

. . . born in Germany, 20 miles from Munich . . . old men there kept bees in long row houses, 20 - 30 colonies in a truck . . . every bee house had different color entrance.

. . . 1951 came to Canada . . . to Ontario . . . one year later to B.C., worked for C.P.R. on coast . . . married Jean . . . looking for place to settle . . . neighbor's bees next door severely stung him when working in his 2 acres of blueberries . . . neighbor Harry Page exchanged help for one gallon of \$3.60 paint and Hirmer started one colony of bees . . . one year later he had 4 colonies.

1968 - had some blueberry plants for sale . . . Mr. S. Adanik, 646 No. 4 Road came over for bushes and was more interested in renting bee colonies.

1969 - increased . . . rented out 46 colonies . . . read lots of books . . . \$6. bee book . . . American Bee Magazine . . . "sometimes the bees don't read the books" so experience teaches.

. . . only bring small colonies in own yard, to look after . . . good, heavy colonies all rented out . . . 60 holding colonies at Western Peat.

. . . in summer bees only last 60 days, because they work so hard . . . bees born after September or October will go through winter . . . die off mid-February but brood rhythm means the queen will start laying again so numbers don't get too low . . .

Feeding bees - . . . give proteins - mixture 15 lbs. imported yeast with 100 pounds sugar on inner cupboard of hive every 2 - 3 weeks depending on weather to end of March or mid-April.

. . . feed hives stored elsewhere as well . . . but these hives have stored honey . . . Hirmer gets stung but doesn't bother him, no swelling . . . wife suffers from sting, medication . . . story about Doug Aldersham, provincial bee man, so badly stung he staggered.

1972 - had 444 hives.

Type of bee - Mostly Caucasian, a black bee . . . seldom keeps it pure . . . Italian (yellow) bee gets into colony, Italian drones are strong fliers . . . result solid or mixed colors . . . crossing bloodlines sometimes results in cross bees . . . mate in mid-air so no control over color . . . best mating months June, July, August for queens . . . weather warm, food plentiful, pollen is rich, nectar good.

. . . order queens from U.S. . . . change 100 - 150 queens in a year . . . importance of good brood pattern stressed . . . starts with egg which hatches after 3 days into larva . . . pupa stage . . . full bee . . . if pattern gets poor usually have an old queen or queen not sufficient enough. Kill off old queen, 3 days later introduce a new queen, making sure there are no queen cells in comb so have to accept the queen just put in . . . in 14 days a new pattern is established . . . changing queens changes blood lines and ensures good quality of nature of the bees.

Caucasian Bee works better in cool weather . . . gentler bee so easy to work with . . . hives don't freeze in winter . . . placed

where good circulation around hive . . . the more bees inside the hive the warmer . . . 85° to 95° inside the cluster, like an incubator, bees feed in winter with honey, inside bees slowly work towards outside, and outside slowly work towards inside . . . leave 50 pounds honey or more in each hive over the winter.

Bees Rented Out

May - to Blueberries . . . 124 - 130 colonies
- Cabbage fields . . . 140 - 150 colonies

June - Cranberries blossom . . . 400 colonies, 3-4 weeks then cucumber farmers . . . just starting, then get bees ready for mountains to get honey.

July, August, and (fireweed plant . . . acres where forest
September (burned over or logging area where slash
(burned . . . get permission . . . put up
(very delicious (electric fence to test for bears, jolts
honey) (between wires . . . if bears persist, warden
(tranquilizes them -(also alfalfa) . . .
(collect quantities around Merritt.

Sell all own unpasteurized honey, no labels yet . . . hope to get 9,000 pounds honey this year as customers buy all they produce . . . word of mouth only advertising.

. . . talks with half dozen beekeepers twice a year, but no association. Honey Pot handles the most pollination for Richmond to Ladner . . . hold 4 colonies bees in Clearbrook Experimental Station, for small fruits . . . 15 acres under cultivation . . . as goodwill measure . . . exchange information on size of food, berries produced.

Kinds of Honey (Hirmer):

Pure Blueberry . . . weather permitting (sometimes white bog flower included)

Cabbage

Cranberries (usually with blackberry, clover because bees overfly field)

Thistle

Fall asters and mint (along dyke Westham Island)

Goldenrod

Sold in 30 pound pails at .50 cents a pound, gallon jars (hold 11 pounds), some in 2 pound jars or 1 pound at .65 cents a pound. Price may go up in 1973 as Wells Can container (distributor from American Can) price is up.

. . . start to sell mid-June . . . phone steady customers . . . supplying Western Peat with bees began with 55 colonies and this year will supply 300 colonies . . . Lulu Island^{Peat Co.} takes 70 colonies.

. . . when Western Peat in full production will need 400 - 500 colonies to mature crop.

. . . hard to get honey because some farmers cut down clover farming . . . so have to go to mountains.

Future . . . may deal in package bees . . . if price increases from U.S. . . . when ceiling levels off at 800 colonies raise own package bees here . . . last year cost \$7.00 for package bees . . . this year package costs \$8.50 - a severe increase . . . queens last year cost \$1.40 to \$1.60 and this year cost \$2.00 to \$2.60.

D. Cleland