

Bees are lifelong work for Bert, Madeline Dodds



CHECKING THE STRAINING tanks, Bert Dodds of Rockhaven Apiaries, prepares pure clover honey for his multitude of customers.



THE LABEL SAYS 'Rockhaven Apiaries' and Bert Dodds is proud of his pure clover honey. He is one of the most successful producers in the province.

by Jennifer Barr
Liveslock can be rough and many a farmer has been kicked, bunted, or gored. Not many of them have been stung, however.

Bert Dodds, owner of Rockhaven Apiaries on the 25 Side road just off Highway 25 and bee keeper par excellence, has been stung so many times he barely notices. "I may utter an oath or two." His arms are covered with tiny white pin prick marks or thousands of stings over the years.

"There's not a place on his body that hasn't been stung," comments Madeline Dodds, Bert's wife who describes herself as a "retired bee chaser."

When Bert started working with bees at the ripe old age of 16, he used to react very badly to stings—his whole arm swelling painfully. But he persevered—"just crazy, I guess"—and now has one of the most successful honey operations in Ontario.

Double average
From 700 colonies this year, Bert hopes to yield his average 200 pounds profit per hive. Last year he averaged 240 pounds per hive but this is unusual, he explains: it was a good year. Most honey producers are delighted with 100 pounds of honey per hive per year.

Bert attributes this phenomenal success to his practice of re-queening every year. New queen bees cost six dollars each and come from Alabama. When each of the 700 hives require a queen each, it's easy to see how the cost can mount into the thousands of dollars. It pays off, though, Bert Dodds says. Rockhaven Apiaries grosses 60 to 70 thousand dollars—before expenses, of course.

Each young queen mates with a drone bee (a male non-worker) two weeks after she is hatched. That one mating will fertilize all the eggs she will lay for a lifetime—up to a hundred thousand a year for as long as ten years. A queen's most productive year is her first which is why Bert Dodds replaces his queens every year.

The queen is responsible for stocking the hive with bees.

She lays eggs that are cared for by the worker bees—barren females. Most of the eggs hatch into workers, a few become drones, and some are fed royal jelly to become new queens.

Worker bees are the ones who fly out daily in search of nectar and pollen to produce honey for stocking the combs. In midsummer, a worker will work night and day, using the dark hours to tidy the hive, store honey and tend new eggs. Is it any wonder that these hard working females only last about three weeks?

Harvesting hives
Bert farms his bees out to roam clover pastures and, occasionally, apple orchards. He has about 30 hive locations as far away as Selkirk on Lake Erie, Simcoe, Cayuga, Bradford and Caledonia. He and his three men travel 25 thousand miles a summer just tending the bee yards. Farmers like having the colonies of 25 or so hives in their fields. It helps with pollination, especially when clover seed is being produced. Bert pays the farmer in cases of honey for his consideration.

Harvesting starts in mid-July. The combs are gathered from each hive, transported to the honey house where they are set in a warm room to liquefy the honey further.

"It can get a mite snug in July," chuckles Bert. The combs are run through a deapper to remove the covering of wax placed over each honey cell by the bees. The combs go through an extractor where honey is removed by centrifugal force and the honey goes through a baffle tank to take out any remaining wax particles. From there the honey is pumped into 45 gallon drums and is stored for winter.

Some honey is sold in bulk to wholesalers overseas and to an area bake shop but most is sold locally at the honey house.

People come from miles around with their own containers to buy honey at an attractive 75 cents a pound. It costs a little more without a container (makes carrying

harder, too). Containers are available from the honey house for an nominal price.

"You never get bored with bees," smiles Bert, "but you never know them." "When the weather's right, the bees go right; when the weather's wrong, so are the bees."

Honey healer
Bert and Madeline Dodds are enthusiastic salesmen for their product. Both tell stories of honey's healing powers. Madeline recommends it for wounds, burns, and scalds, while Bert says a person who eats honey never has digestive problems.

"Honey was the only medicine in biblical times," he explains.

Bacteria can't live in honey, Bert says, which makes it such a good anti-septic. Honey has also been long known to help hay fever sufferers. If sneezers take a tablespoon of honey daily every day of the year an immunity to pollen will be built up. Even the medical faculty are now beginning to agree with this 'old farmer's tale'.

There's an even bigger demand for honey today than previously. Health food stores, new awareness of nutrition, increasing demand from European-Canadians who were used to lots of honey in the old country—all are in the market for good honey. "You could sell a train load if you had it," says Bert.

Trying to cut down
But Bert and Madeline are trying to cut down their production.

"You can make a good living out of 300 hives," Bert explains as he says he wants to get the number of hives down to an amount he can handle alone.

He sold 100 hives this spring and will continue to sell. He prefers to sell in lots of 20 hives or better to small producers. He feels most people wanting to buy one or

two hives for their own use don't know enough about bees.

"You gotta work with bees for two or three years." Bert feels it's too expensive (100 dollars per basic hive) and too demanding an occupation for most hobby farmers.

With the family grown and away from home, Madeline and Bert, with dog, Happy, are enjoying their cottage on Georgian Bay. For this reason, the honey house is only open three days a week, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from early morning till 9 at night.

During the week, Bert is on the road chasing bees and Madeline tends the five acres, garden, raspberry patch and also chases the occasional bee.

But come Friday, they're off to the cottage, the boat and beach—"when you stay home, you're working!"



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Defer plan for 129 houses in Glen

A development of 129 single family homes on the Wagstaffe farm, on the Ninth Line, Glen Williams, was deferred by Halton Hills Planning Board until a secondary plan for the hamlet of Glen Williams is completed.

The lots, on the 76 acre parcel of land, would be a minimum of 20,000 square feet, and add approximately 490 people to the village, using the figure of 3.8 people per house. This would up the population of the Glen by 45 per cent.

Will Shaw, of Glen Williams Developments, said he had made it clear to the planner he would like his opinion on the number of lots he would like to see on that land. He claimed there are 142 homes in the area and contended that did not make it an entirely rural area.

Welcome families

Welcome Wagon hostess Linda Franklin welcomed 11 new families to Acton in July.

Two British Columbia families are now residing in Acton, Mr. and Mrs. M. Champion from Vancouver and Mr. D. Bercezek and Ms. Malmsten from Coquitlam, B.C.

Two newlywed couples making their home in Acton are Mr. and Mrs. J. Worthington from Milton and Cambridge and Mr. and Mrs. M. Regan from Waterloo and Brampton.

Former Mississauga residents Mr. and Mrs. Landriault and sons, and Mr. and Mrs. R. Riches and children have also made Acton their new home.

Mr. and Mrs. Parker and their three children have recently moved from Streetsville and Mr. and Mrs. Rolfe and children from Georgetown.

From Sudbury are Mr. and Mrs. Richmond and family. Mr. and Mrs. B. Foster and child have recently moved to Acton from Haliburton. Mr. R. Hood has moved here from Oakville.

Cops check exposures

Halton Regional Police are continuing to check into two incidents of indecent exposure on the weekend.

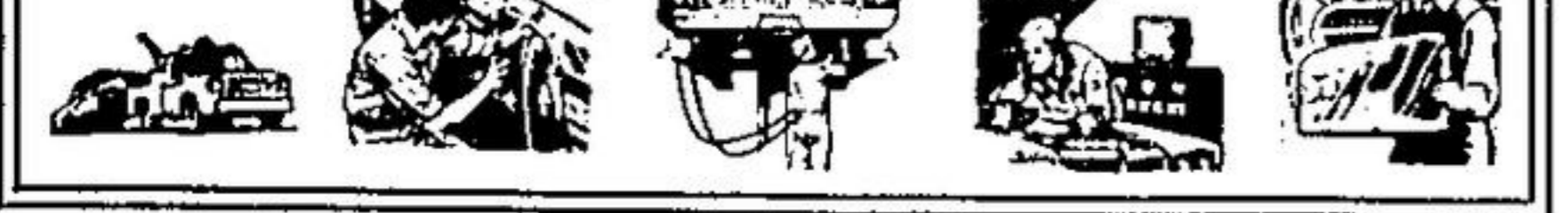
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