



## West Virginia Beekeepers Association

19 February 2008

To the Reader

The following pages represent the most recent draft of the West Virginia Best Management Practices for Beekeeping, as approved by the BMP Committee of the WVBA.

This file is for you and your local association membership to review and commentback to the Committee.

A few questions are most likely to result as you present this to your members. Like, why we need a BMP, what would be the benefit, and is it mandatory.

1. First and foremost, the BMP is a list of guidelines not rules that all beekeepers should be using in there day to day operations. It also includes suggestive actions to correct potential problems and basic ways to be a good neighbor and or guest on the lands of others where you might have “out yards” or apiaries.
2. It is our intention and hope that once we adopt a BMP as a WVBA policy and submit it to the Commissioner of Agriculture, then we can approach the WV Legislators to develop a law granting those practicing the BMP immunity from legal actions that may be brought against a beekeeper for injury resulting from an encounter with honey bees.
3. It is proposed that participation in the BMP be **voluntary**. The participant would register with the WV Dept of Ag and certification of compliance would be noted during inspections by the Apiary Inspectors.

Please present this to your local associations and send your comments to the Committee at the following addresses:

Gabe Blatt, Committee Chair – <mailto:gblatt@schoolspecialty.com>

David Rectenwald, Committee Member – <mailto:drectenwald@earthlink.net>

Tom Kees, Committee Member – [mailto: beesnbooks70@peoplepc.com](mailto:beesnbooks70@peoplepc.com)

Thank you

West Virginia  
Best  
Management  
Practices  
  
for  
Beekeeping

Draft - Jan 31, 2008

## Regulating Authority and Agencies

The West Virginia Apiary Law of 1991, Article §19-13, Short Title "The WV Apiary Act".

The West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture (The Commissioner)

West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WV Ag)

Marketing and Development Division (MDD)

Apiary Inspection Program (AIP)

## Introduction

1. It is the intention that the guide lines forming this *Best Management Practices Program* form a prescription for harmonious cooperation between beekeepers, neighbors, landowners and others whom might come in close proximity to, or in direct contact with honeybees. The guidelines for bee colony management in these *Best Management Practices* also constitute a standard for beekeepers operating in WV to follow, and should be recognized and used as such by apiarists, decision making authorities, and the general public. Finally, these *Best Management Practices* provide a consistent approach for clarifying and resolving issues. Beekeepers and local authorities who need more information should consult the West Virginia Department of Agriculture and the West Virginia Beekeepers Association. (See page 8 of 8 for contact information.)
2. This document is intended as a reference and standard for honeybee management in WV, with particular emphasis on urban and suburban locations. It may serve as:
  - a. A resource for information to reinforce community confidence in the safety of beekeeping activities.
  - b. A standard reference, should complaints or conflicts about beekeeping activities arise.
  - c. A guide of best management practices that all West Virginia Beekeepers might follow.
3. This is a voluntary program designed to minimize the impact and or hazards associated with managing European Honey Bee (EHB) colonies in WV and to dilute any feral Africanized Honey Bee Colonies (AHB) that may relocate into WV. Well managed gentle colonies of EHB are our best line of defense against AHB colonization.
4. Beekeepers participating in this program will sign a compliance agreement with the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, Marketing and Development Division, Apiary Inspection Program (WV Ag, MDD, AIP).
5. Participants will maintain a valid registration with the WV Ag, MDD, AIP and be current with all inspections per the WV Apiary Act.
6. The recognized authority for compliance with the WV Best Management Practices Program shall be the WV Commissioner of Agriculture through his/her representatives I.E. the State Apiarist and Apiary Specialist. This Commissioner of Agriculture's decision on the safe operation and or corrective actions shall be final.

## Definitions

**Apiculture/Beekeeping** – The management of beehives.

**Apiarist/Beekeeper** – A person who manages or keeps bees.

**Apiary/Bee Yard** – A place where Honeybee hives are kept.

**Bee Hive** – Removable framed housing for a honeybee colony.

**Bee Sting** – Injury sustained and or inflicted by a worker honeybee.

**Brand** – Identification of hives and hive equipment by burning, painting or marking.

**Dearth** – A condition or time when nectar is not available or in low supply.

**Emergency Foraging** – Foraging by bees in animal feed, bird feeders and other sources of protein when normal sources are not available.

**Flight Path** – The distinct route taken by many bees leaving and returning for foraging flights.

**Foraging Bees** – Worker bees seeking and gathering nectar, pollen, minerals, water, and other needs of the hive.

**Hive** – A home or abode for honeybees, made up of a single or multiple boxes with movable frames. The term may apply to a nucleus box or any standard size hive systems.

**Honeycomb** – Removable frames, containing wax cells which house honey, pollen and brood.

**Honey Flow** – The gathering of nectar from flora by honeybees.

**Honey Extraction** – The removal of surplus honey from honeycombs.

**Out Yard** – An apiary or bee yard that is not located on the residence of the apiarist or beekeeper but on the lands of another.

**Package Bees** – An artificial swarm contained in a ventilated box either with or without a queen packaged for shipping via the US Postal Service or other carrier.

**Pollination** – The fertilization of flowers by honeybees by transfer of pollen from the anthers of one flower to the stigma of another for the purpose of setting fruit, nuts, berries or vegetables.

**Robbing** – An attack on one colony by the bees of another, typically for the purpose of stealing honey.

**Strong Hive** – A populous honeybee colony.

**Super** – A box or boxes containing removable frames, placed above the food chamber of a hive for the purpose of collecting surplus honey from the honeybees.

**Swarm** – Cluster of bees issued from an established colony, either clustered or flying, containing workers, drones and a queen.

**Water Supply** – Any source of water, I.E. springs, hoses, streams, puddles, ponds, hot tubs, pools or other sources either man made or natural.

## **Requirement to Register**

It is a requirement under WV State Law Section 19 Article 13. Inspection and Protection of Agriculture, known as the West Virginia Apiary Law of 1991 or short titled “the WV Apiary Act”

- a. §19-13-4. Registration of Bees; Identification of Apiaries.
- b. §19-13-4(a.) All persons keeping bees in this state shall apply for a certificate of registration for beekeeping from the Commissioner, within ten days of the date that bees are acquired, by notifying the Commissioner, in writing, of the number and locations on their own property or someone else’s property. All apiary certificates expire on the thirty-first day of December of each year and must be renewed annually.
- c. §19-13-4(b.) All persons owning or operating an apiary which is not located on their own property must post the name and address of the owner or operator in a conspicuous place in the apiary.

## **Swarms and Bee Enquiries**

A current list of beekeepers who have stated their will to collect honeybee swarms is kept by the WV Dept of Ag, MDD, and is updated annually. The WV Ag also post copies of this list with of the County Extension Agents in the State. Swarm inquiries from the public may be directed to the WV Dept of Agriculture, or any of the County Extension Offices, or to the WV Beekeepers Association. Other general beekeeping questions may be directed to the WV Department of Agriculture or the WV Beekeepers Association. (See page 8 of 8 for all contact information.)

## **Hive Densities**

One of the primary limitations to keeping bees is the real or perceived interaction between the bees and the people who live in or use the surrounding area. To overcome this problem, a hive density limit is proposed that minimizes potential conflict between people and honeybees, assuming that beekeepers follow the management practices outlined in this document.

Established colonies are at their most gentle state when busied gathering pollens and nectar. During nectar flows when the competition for resources is not as great the possibility of incidences are lower. By not stressing the carrying capacity of the area surrounding your hives you can keep your bees happier, healthier and more neighbor friendly.

Beekeepers are advised to closely observe their individual apiary locations and hives to determine the normal carrying capacity of the area and to limit the number of hives on those sites at or below that number. Signs of overpopulation or over saturation of an apiary include but are not limited to slow colony growth, poor honey production and abnormal defensive behavior.

## **Hive Placement**

Correct placement of hives is a most important consideration for responsible beekeeping in all situations. Hives must be in as quiet an area of the lot as possible and not placed directly against a neighboring property unless a solid fence or impenetrable vegetative barrier not less than six feet high forms the property boundary or the neighboring lands are used for agricultural purposes woodland or are non-developed or not frequented by human activities, pets or farm animals.

Hives should be kept as far away as possible from roads, sidewalks, and rights of way or other areas where normal human activity is frequent and may result in a honeybee vs. human incident.

Hive entrances should face in so that the flight path is across your property. If this is impossible, use barriers (hedges, shrubs, or fencing six to twelve feet high) to redirect the bees’ flight path.

It is advised to post warning signs along approach avenues near out yards or apiaries. Where possible within sight of the bee hives, but at a safe distance from the hives in attempt to avoid incidents involving those who may not be aware of the apiary location.

## **Swarming**

Swarming is a natural instinct of honeybees that occurs chiefly from spring to early summer. Swarms should be collected and hived to prevent their becoming a nuisance and to help prevent the spread of honeybee pest and diseases.

Swarms from locations captured from areas of interstate transportation operating centers or other than a location were the swarm's origin may be questionable should be monitored frequently for abnormal defensiveness. Any excessively defensive hive from a collected swarm should be brought to the attention of the Commissioners Apiary staff and checked for African Traits using the using the Fast African Bee Identification System (FABIS) and/or the computer-assisted morphometric procedure, i.e. Universal System for the Detection of AHB (USDA-ID), or other methods approved by WV Ag.

Honeybee colonies can and should be managed to prevent or minimize swarming. For example, brood chamber manipulation, colony division, adding supers for brood rearing and honey storage, and replacing old or failing queens can all reduce the swarming impulse. These and other management practices to control swarming are explained in detail in good beekeeping textbooks. Beekeepers who learn of a swarm should take reasonable measures to see that the swarm is retrieved.

## **Provision of Water**

Beekeepers should provide water for their bees before locating them in their yard. Bees prefer a sunny place with surface moisture, for example wet sand or gravel or the edge of a birdbath. If you establish such water sources, your bees will become habituated to them and will be less likely to visit swimming pools or hot tubs. Remember that in very hot weather, bees use a large amount of water to maintain temperature and humidity within the hive.

## **Queens**

All queens must be European stock. Beekeepers should ensure that all of their queens are marked for quick positive identification and to ensure the hive has not been invaded by unwanted bees, or that the hive has not superseded the queen. Clipping is an optional management tool to aid in swarm management, however, historically, clipped queens are frequently superseded.

Ensure that your queens are young and vigorous layers. Less than two years old is preferred but each beekeeper must evaluate their queens on a regular basis for performance and hive gentleness.

Should any colony exhibit unusual defensive characteristics, I.E. stinging or attempting to sting without provocation or noticeable stress related conditions, or exhibits a frequent tendency to swarm it is the beekeeper's duty to report these conditions to the WV Ag Apiary Inspectors and requeen the hive using European stock. The beekeeper should also request that the AIP perform a Fast African Bee Identification System (FABIS) and/or the computer-assisted morphometric procedure, i.e. Universal System for the Detection of AHB (USDA-ID), or other methods approved by WV Ag.

## **Drones**

Drones are the male honeybees and in the past have been managed for a minimal population in the hive. However, with the development of integrated pest management and the possibility of Africanize bees beekeepers are advised to maintain one EHB drone source colony (250 square inches of drone comb, one deep frame) of drone foundation for every 10 colonies in order to reduce the possibility of supersedure queens from mating with AHB drones and to provide sufficient drone saturation to ensure successful fertilization of EHB queens.

## **Robbing Behavior**

When nectar is scarce, honeybees may attack weaker colonies and rob honey from other hives. During robbing bees may become very agitated and sting unwary bystanders. Under dearth conditions, beekeepers should work hives for only a very short time, if at all. Exposing honey (especially sticky honeycombs) outdoors often encourages robbing. All spilled honey should be cleaned up immediately. To prevent robbing, buildings and trailers used for honey extraction must be made bee-proof, as far as is practicable.

## **Disease Control**

There are a number of honeybee diseases and pests, of which American Foulbrood (AFB) is the most serious. Beekeepers should be extremely cautious about mixing hive equipment or purchasing used hives from sources that they are not be certain to be AFB free.

The WV Dept of Agriculture offers free sanitation of used beehive equipment to all beekeepers in our state. This is done through the use of an autoclave operated by the Apiary Inspection Staff. Beekeepers should contact the WV Ag, MDD,AIP, or their District Apiary Specialist to schedule an appointment and location of the system. It is the beekeepers responsibility to transport his or her hive equipment to and from the location of the autoclave.

It is incumbent upon all beekeepers to manage parasitic mites and other pest responsibly for colony health, honey quality and containment of infections. Should AHB or other highly infectious diseases be detected or suspected the beekeeper should immediately contact their Apiary Inspection Specialist and report the condition and location of the hive or hives and ask for assistance if needed.

## **Transportation of Hives**

Beekeepers must take appropriate care when relocating or transporting hives of honeybees. All loads of hives and supers of honey should be secured and as bee-proof as possible. Bees being transported should have entrance screens or be secured under netting. The US Department of Transportation governs the interstate transportation regulations regarding the transportation of honeybees by motor vehicle and other forms of commercial transport. These laws apply to transporting honeybees within WV.

WV State Code §19-13-7 of the WV Apiary Act covers the transportation of honeybees, used bee equipment and or appliances into the State of WV by individuals. All beekeepers must comply with this regulation.

## **Recommendations for Considerate Hive Management**

Beekeepers should take into account that weather conditions influence bee behavior and plan to work bees when conditions are favorable. They should make sure that neighbors are not working or relaxing outdoors when they open hives and should try to perform hive manipulations as quickly as possible, with minimum disturbance to the bees. Extended hive manipulations, particularly removing honey, should be carefully planned to accommodate neighbors' activities. Beekeepers should use smoke when working bees and should smoke hive entrances before mowing or trimming in the hive area. Clippings and exhaust should be directed away from hive entrances.

## **Out Yard Management**

Beekeepers who maintain out yards on the lands of others, are advised to enter into a written agreement with the landowner prior to establishing the apiary, or as soon as possible thereafter to ensure that both parties are in agreement to the conditions that define the expectations and limitation of the land use to include any anticipated payments or reimbursements owed or anticipated by either party.

These agreements should spell out the following items:

Date that the yard may be established and if known or estimated the date that the hives are to be removed.

The number of hives that will be allowed on the property, location or locations of the apiary or apiaries.

The conditions and frequency of ingress and egress. How often may you visit the yard, accessibility through gates, wet or dry conditions, type of conveyance allowed.

Area that you will be required to maintain beyond the limits of the bee yard.

Maintenance methods, gasoline string trimmers, herbicide use, hand tools only ect.

Predator preventative measures that you may be allowed to take I.E. electric fences for bear protection.

Notification timelines should the landowner use or anticipate the use of insecticides that may affect the hives.

This is a general list of items that might be addressed in a landowner/beekeeper agreement. Each agreement should be tailored per the conditions and situations as required to meet the needs and expectations of both parties.

#### Additional Information

##### **WEST VIRGINIA BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION**

For a current list of officers and directors go to [www.wvbeekeepers.org](http://www.wvbeekeepers.org)

##### **WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

Marketing and Development Division  
1900 Kanawha Boulevard East  
State Capitol, Room E-28  
Charleston, WV 25305-0170  
(304) 558-2210  
<http://www.wvagriculture.org/contact.html>

##### **COOPERATIVE EXTENSION OFFICES**

For information on all county extension offices:  
West Virginia University Extension Service  
Box 6031  
Morgantown, WV 26506  
(304) 293-5691  
<http://www.wvu.edu/~EXTEND/depts/county.htm>

#### Acknowledgements

The West Virginia Beekeepers Association gratefully acknowledges our debt to the *Code of Practice for Urban Beekeeping in Queensland* (<http://www2.dpi.qld.gov.au/bees/16815.html>), published by the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, Queensland, Australia ([www.dpi.qld.gov.au](http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au)), and to the *Model Beekeeping Ordinance for Louisiana Local and Municipal Governments*, published by the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center and to the Maine State Beekeepers Association .

Information is provided in this document as general advice on sound beekeeping practices. Beekeepers, local authorities, and others should seek professional advice on specific issues and situations.