

AGRICULTURE COMMISSION MINUTES

November 2, 2023

MEMBERS PRESENT: Sarah M Silk, Chair/Secretary; Lawreen Strauch, Vice-Chair; Marge Strunk; Dave Strauch; Katy Peternel; Wendy Rodgers; David Rodgers

ALTERNATES PRESENT: Kurt DeVylder

ALTERNATES ABSENT: Macy Gotthardt

BOS LIAISON ABSENT: Dave Senecal

GUESTS PRESENT: T K Kennedy

PRESENTERS: Athena Contus, Tom Contus

I. Approve Minutes of 8-3-23:

Sarah Silk, Chair, opened the meeting at 6:50 PM. Introductions were made as there was a guest, T K Kennedy, and Athena and Tom Contus from Athena's Bees were present for a presentation.

With a motion from Wendy Rodgers and a second from Marge Strunk, the Minutes of 8-3-23 were accepted as written.

II. Updates: Farmers Market (Nadine San Antonio)/CCCD (Catherine Default):

Nadine San Antonio had been instrumental in locating the speaker for the Ag Comm meeting. It was noted that the Farmer's Market has moved to the late fall location as of mid-October. They will be at Makers Mill on Bay Street until Christmas. Important to note is the change of date to Fridays, and the later time of 3-6pm.

There was no update from the CCCD.

III. Speaker: Athena Contus, Certified Master Beekeeper, Athena's Bees:

Athena opened with a brief history of bees being transported in the 1500-1600's. They acclimated to the colder climate of northern New England in the far north woods as shown by DNA analysis by studies at Cornell of present day bees.

It wasn't until the 1700-1800's that the role of bees in pollination was understood. The females do the work of collecting nectar, water, and plant resins for food and to fight fungus and bacteria in the hive. The teamwork also involves wing activity to cool the hive and acting to essentially give GPS directions to fellow bees of the locations of nectar and pollen producing plants.

Bees recognize landmarks and their own hives. Lemon grass oil is used to entice bees into hive boxes (orchards and farmers hire bees for pollination seasons specific to their planted crops). Better than German bees are Italian honey bees. At least 1/3 of the food supply is dependent on the industry of trucking bees.

Bees are considered “livestock” by the Dept of Agriculture. It appears the NH rules are somewhat outdated, lack oversight, no registration for hives, and warnings of insecticide spraying that would protect bees, are weak. Best practice is to register your hives and get on the map.

Bees are unable to fly in NH when it is colder than 57*, as the big honey producer bees are not good with the cold, although they can produce 10 LBS of honey a month. Bees do not hibernate in the winter, but cluster to the center of the hive.

There is the NH Beekeepers Assoc, Winnepesaukee Beekeepers group in Tuftonboro, (with others in Lee, Concord, Plymouth, Deerfield, Littleton, Warner, Merrimack, Keene, and North Haverhill), there is also the American Beekeepers Federation, and in other countries such as the UK.

Mowing is a great killer of 2/3 of foraging bees leading to changes in machinery to be pollinator friendly. Carvings in Zimbabwe from 10,000 BC show cross sections of hives and smoking a colony of bees.

The loss of ash trees to insect infestation will likely have a detrimental effect on bees as tree flowers in northern New England such as ash and oak are important to bees.

It is important to check the hives to verify that the queen is healthy. In 2000, the Univ of Montana started mapping chemicals and environmental toxins in bee hives for the US military. NH had pollen analyzed about 8 yrs ago with one of the lowest levels due to low industrial activity.

There was a brief discussion about predator wasps that eat flies and are used by dairy farmers. Wasps peak in the fall, with birds eating them in the spring when it is too cold for bee activity.

Mowing late in the day when bees are less active, and considering weeds as beneficial for bees is proactive. Nectar is gathered from 8-1 and pollen in the afternoon. Bees collect primarily from a 3 mile radius, do not fly if too cold, rainy, snowy, or drought. Late June is swarm season with 25% swarming in the woods, 75% make it thru to the 2nd year about 15-20' off the ground. A solar powered electric fence (high for bears, low for other critters) is good to protect hives.

Athena described the adult education program starting in January and going thru May. There were inquiries about Tues/Thurs classes, Zoom classes due to inclement weather driving, some in-person sessions.

IV. Any Other Business:

There was none.

V. Next Meeting Date – Adjourn:

Sarah thanked Athena and Tom for the program with a visual component and answering the many questions put forth by members.

There will be a meeting of the Ag Comm on Dec 7th (at the regular 6:45pm time at the Library) to review the Annual Report for the Town Book.

With a motion from Katy Peternel and a second from Wendy Rodgers, the meeting was adjourned at 8:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah M Silk, Secretary

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