

Season's Greetings to all fellow Sudbury and District Beekeepers!!

Jo-Anne asked us to give an update of our happenings over 2020 with both of our golden harvests, so we agreed to share!

The year's first harvest!

Sucrerie Séguin Sugarbush collects maple sap from close to 8000 taps annually. Our harvest is dependent on sugars that the trees have created through the process of photosynthesis and stored in their roots. It is dependent, not only on the freeze thaw cycles of the harvest season, but also on the weather of the previous spring, summer, fall and winter. Although winter fell early in the fall of 2019, we had some warm thaws in January/February 2020. This warm weather helps to start the tree moving fluids and sugars. If we don't get winter thaws, we seem to produce a lot of early "metabolic" syrup, which isn't as desirable with regards to flavour. The syrup for us this year was beautiful in flavour, and plentiful. Sap sugar content was quite high for a second year in a row! We were able to produce a record crop of excellent quality syrup! At the same time, COVID-19 became a reality in Canada and around the world, resulting in a record low number of visitors coming to the sugarbush. We enjoyed a safe, peaceful sugar season in our little bush bubble, and transported all of the syrup home. Thankfully, the virus did promote an awareness for local food sustainability. We continued to have strong syrup sales throughout the year, although selling more through our wholesale markets as compared to farm gate. About half of our pipeline that has been used for 13 seasons and was starting to show its' age! We spent the first few weeks after our season pulling down around 4000 taps, and kilometres of pipeline used for sap transportation. Since then, between our regular tasks of packing syrup, creating maple product, and beekeeping, we have been going non-stop to install an improved sap collection, transportation and monitoring system. Hopefully it will be ready for our 2021 season!

Traditionally, we have entered an array of maple products in the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto each fall since 2010. Being held virtually, the deadline for entries arriving for judging was a month earlier than usual, corresponding with our end of season honey extraction and beekeeping tasks. We submitted only 2 samples of syrup which we had prepared in the spring, and were blessed to win the Amber class of syrup, taking away Reserve Grand Champion.

Our other sweet and sticky adventures!

Although the winter of 2019/2020 was not the coldest on record, it was likely one of the longest - with snow beginning in October, and spring continuing cool into May! Despite heavily feeding our overwintered colonies, and supplementing with fondant, then pollen patties in March, and more fondant in the spring, we experienced heavy losses. Thankfully, the bees that did come through were very strong. We had the opportunity to buy some hives that we helped care for the summer before, from the Tech Transfer Program, as well as some nucs, and created many nucs from our strong colonies using local queens and queen cells. The dry conditions in June and July resulted initially in excellent foraging conditions for the bees, but come August our bees in Sturgeon Falls and Crystal Falls and at our home yard in Lavigne lost much of their forage, and ate up a lot of their honey stores. We had started 2 small yards just south of Lavigne that had access to a late canola crop, as well as beautiful buckwheat in August and September. These bees flourished in honey production. Overall, we extracted an average crop, with an abundance of buckwheat in some of our honey.

However, what an unusual fall!! The bees in our colonies were numerous as we removed honey supers and commenced feeding. This fall was quite wet and overcast. We experienced a substantial amount of swarming in late August through September. Many hives still had significant bees remaining, but were new queens successful in being reared? Did the weather provide them a chance for adequate mating? Several other local beekeepers reported similar phenomena, as well as beekeeper friends down in Toronto. Normally bees do not swarm in September! What message are they trying to give us? What caused this? Other beekeepers that we know experienced absconding prior to winterizing. Why?

Although the bees that we winterized were still plentiful in number, and very well fed, it does make us doubtful about queen health, and therefore hive health, as we overwinter. So, we did everything in our power to keep them otherwise healthy. Our varroa mite numbers were relatively low this fall, despite abundant hive populations. We treated for mites, and used oxytetracycline for the prevention of American Foulbrood. We installed mouse guards. This fall we invested in Western Winter Wraps that we purchased from Inland Plastics. They looked so cozy as we bundled them up, along with an additional top dressing of fondant!

Hopefully some of you considered entering the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair Honey Competition. We have only entered twice, 2012, when we achieved Grand Champion, and 2013, where we were blessed with Reserve Grand Champion. Unfortunately, when we upgraded our extraction facility in 2014 and 2015, and mix the honey from our wax

press with our extracted honey, the result is slightly cloudy honey. To successfully compete at the RAWF, we would have to extract honey using our older, smaller extractor to produce perfectly clear honey, which we just do not have time to do!

One fun thing all beekeepers (and maple syrup makers) can do is to trade their honey between friends. It is amazing the different flavours of honey that is produced from bee yard to bee yard, within hives and even individual frames. This is a great way to connect and taste some amazing honey that you don't experience from the flowers that your bees forage from!

As we approach Christmas, a time of hope and light in the darkness, we wish all of you hopeful beekeepers (hope is what keeps us going!) great Health and Peace and Wonderful Strong Overwintered Colonies in 2021! Bee safe!!!

Tracy and Dan Séguin

NOTES:

Interesting Winter Reading - Great Gift Idea:

Bee Time: Lessons from the Hive by Mark L. Winston 2014

Canadian Agricultural Partnership, carried out by the Ontario Soil and Crop Association has two cost-share funding streams for registered beekeepers to support managed bee health:

1. Honey Bee Health Management
2. Advancing Beekeeper Business Capacity

For registered beekeepers of 10 or more hives, this provides cost share funding up to 50% to a maximum of \$3500. The program ends February 15, 2021, before which you must have applied, been accepted, purchased and submitted all related invoices.

Canadian Agricultural Partnership / Apiculture

Grants available to beekeepers

<https://ontarioprogramguides.net/category/producer/apiculture/>

