

Orange County Beekeepers Association

Meeting Minutes

January 14, 2022

Tim Struttman, OCBA President, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone for the first meeting of 2022. The meeting was attended by 42 members (32 via Zoom, and 10 in-person at the new Orange County Extension Office in Hillsborough).

Nancy Oglesby, OCBA Vice President, introduced our speaker, **Clint Brooks**, of Brooks Mill Farms (<https://brooksmillfarms.com>). Clint is a commercial beekeeper with a focus on honey production and breeding of varroa-sensitive hygienic (VSH) queens.

Presentation:

“Managing Varroa Using VSH Genes” -- Clint Brooks

Clint started beekeeping 7 years ago because he was unhappy with the cost and quality of commercial queens. He explained that varroa-sensitive hygienic (VSH) behavior is a trait that can be expressed by any race of honey bee (Italian, Carniolan, etc). VSH behavior involves an olfactory response to mites present in the cells of capped brood. Nurse bees detect, uncap, pull out the mites, and recap the cell, thus disrupting the reproductive lifecycle of the varroa. Clint’s goal is to produce high quality VSH queens that induce the desired hygienic behavior of reducing mite loads, but not at the expense of sacrificing brood and honey production, gentleness, and hardiness, etc.

Clint described his VSH queen raising process beginning at the arrival of new breeder queens (artificially/instrumentally inseminated-can cost upwards of \$250!). New breeder queens typically arrive in the summer/fall, which gives Clint a chance to assess traits (including VSH) and identify strengths/weaknesses of each breeder queen. Only the breeder queens with the desired traits are selected for generating new queens. Early the following spring, the grafting queens from the prior year are set out and given plenty of drone-comb drawn foundation, in order to generate high numbers of drones carrying the VSH breeder queen’s genetics. The goal of these so-called drone holding colonies is to saturate the area with drones of the desired lineage as much as possible. These drone holding colonies are then moved out of the main portion of the mating yard (between 0-1 mile away, in all 4 cardinal directions). Clint usually starts the first round of grafting from the newest breeder queens in early March, but pointed out that the weather can bring unpredictable surprises when it comes time to introduce hatched grafted queens into the mating nucs!

Overall, Clint feels that using VSH queens does help with varroa mite management, but still stressed that it should be considered one tool in the IPM toolbox, not a single solution.

Club Business:

Membership

Wayne Vanderburg, Membership Co-director, reported that the 2022 membership renewal process is now open, and that 50% of OCBA members have already renewed for 2022. He reviewed the list of member benefits, which includes programs that support both new and experienced beekeepers: monthly member meetings, first-year clusters, collaboratives, master beekeeper study group, journal discussion group, and access to extraction equipment rental among other benefits including some new to be announced for 2022.

Bee School

Randall Austin, Education Director, provided an update on the 2022 OCBA Bee School, which is set to start on Jan 18th. There are 82 people signed up and classes will be conducted with a hybrid approach—attendees have the option of attending in person or remotely via Zoom.

Apprenticeship

Kent Robertson, Mentorship Co-director, announced that the 2 apprentices for the coming season have been selected, and mentors have been assigned. Our apprentices will be introduced at the February meeting.

Practice, Support, and Recovery Pilot Program

Celeste Mayer introduced a new initiative that the OCBA will pilot this year, called the “Practice, Support, and Recovery Program”. The goal of the “Support” arm of this proposal is to support one another “when life happens”. This would include temporary care of a member’s hives if incapacitated due to illness or other reason. The “Recovery” arm will involve rehoming of hives from beekeepers who no longer wish to keep bees. The “Practice” arm would establish a club apiary that could serve as a place to give new beekeepers hands-on experience. This could also serve people with an interest in bees, but who aren’t able to have their own apiary.

Celeste indicated that more information and a call for volunteers will be forthcoming.

Door Prizes

1. Jim Greco: OCBA t-shirt
2. Axel Elling: OCBA t-shirt
3. Kenneth Lee: 8-frame robbing screen

Next Month’s Speaker

The speaker for February will be George McAllister, from the Mecklenburg County Beekeepers Association. He will be speaking about how he uses queen castles as a tool to increase honey production and control swarming.

Erika Wittchen
OCBA Secretary