

Orange County Beekeepers Association

Monthly Members Meeting Minutes

February 9, 2023

Nancy Oglesby, OCBA President, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone for the February meeting. The meeting was attended by 53 members (12 via Zoom, and 41 in-person at the Orange County Extension Office in Hillsborough).

Janet Staats, OCBA Vice-president, introduced our speaker, **Martin Crompton**, Vineyard and Project Director at Union Grove Farm <https://uniongrovefarm.com/about-our-vineyard> (former site of Maple View Farms). Martin's work focuses on regenerative farming, sustainability, energy efficiency, and waste reduction. Last fall, Martin kindly offered the use of Union Grove Farm to build the float we made for the Hillsborough Holiday Parade.

Presentation:

Regenerative Farming and the Role of Pollinators in Farming Practice

The goal of Union Grove Vineyard is to develop the world's first seedless muscadine grape (a grape native to North Carolina) and bring it to market. Becoming known as a "superfood", muscadine grapes contain extremely high levels of polyphenols and antioxidants, and muscadine extracts have been the focus of many scientific studies into their health benefits (<https://www.ncmuscadinegrape.org/muscadine-health-benefits-links-to-scientific-research-papers/>). Of note, a North Carolina researcher – Dr. Patricia Gallagher (Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center) – is a leading researcher studying muscadine grape extract in cancer clinical trials.

Martin Crompton spoke on how Union Grove Farms has set out to reach their goal of bringing the first seedless muscadine grape to market, and how they plan to do it using regenerative agriculture practices:

- Minimizing soil disturbance
- Maximize crop diversity
- Keep the soil covered
- Maintain living root year-round
- Integrate livestock

Minimizing soil disturbance (no till farming) is a way to keep the soil fertile and rich in microbes. The soil microbiota helps plants collect nutrients, resist disease and pests, and also improves water retention, oxygen penetration, and reduces erosion. Cover crops are also a way to maximize diversity when growing monoculture crops like grapes. Between-row cover crops, such as clover, serve to naturally suppress weeds without the use of herbicides. Other cover crops, such as legumes, fix nitrogen in the soil making the nutrient accessible for other plants. Martin also noted they are experimenting with crops such as daikon radish, with its long taproot, as a no-till means to help break up the hard clay soil. Livestock (eg, sheep) are environmentally friendly herbicide and fertilizer "machines" as part of a rotational grazing strategy that Union Grove Farms will employ. Sheep will also "prune" the lower levels of crops, which encourages regrowth. Union Grove Farms uses vermicompost (worms) as their

main method of soil enrichment. They also make a compost “tea” which can be used as a soil drench and foliar spray.

So what does this have to do with honey bees? Many of the regenerative farming practices Martin presented to us will also have a positive impact on native pollinators and honey bees. In fact, Union Grove Farms hosts some honey bee colonies from Frick’s Apiaries as a valuable part of the farm ecosystem. While grapes are self-pollinating and do not need insects for pollination, healthy cover crops at Union Grove Farms do! Because Union Grove Farms strives to use alternatives to conventional pesticides, including neonicotinoids, their farming practices will help provide a healthy environment for pollinators of all kinds.

Club Business:

Announcements (Nancy):

Announcement 1: Nancy thanked everyone who contributed to tonight’s “potluck” by bringing food and beverages to share. A sign-up sheet for future meetings was circulated. We could use at least 1 more contributor for April’s meeting.

Announcement 2: The upcoming North Carolina State Beekeepers Association spring meeting (March 10-11 in Monroe, NC) and the Honey Judging Workshop (March 9) conflict with our monthly meeting schedule. Therefore, there will NOT be a March monthly OCBA members meeting, and we encourage members to attend the state meeting instead. We will resume our OCBA meetings in April.

Announcement 3: OCBA is planning a field day and fundraising BBQ in late May/early June. We hope to also include an equipment swap, a raffle for a to-be-announced great prize (to raise money for the NCSU endowed professorship in apiculture fund), and possibly have a hive inspection demonstration. We could use one or two more volunteers for the organizing committee. Nancy circulated a sign-up sheet.

Membership

Mary Anne Rhyne, Membership Co-director, reminded members to renew their membership. Dues must be paid by the end of March if the member wishes to rent the club’s extractor equipment this season. Nancy encouraged members to also join the NCSBA at the same time.

Bee School

Carrie Donley, Education Co-Director, reported there are now 110 people signed up for Bee School! This includes 10 or so people who signed up after it already started. Carrie noted this was made possible only due to the hybrid model – in-person and online with zoom recordings available. The bee school is 4 weeks in, and upcoming is the hive building workshop at Tim Struttman’s farm.

Outreach

Dawn Rogers, Community Outreach Director, introduced Victoria Hill and Robert King, as the new Outreach Co-directors. There are more outreach events planned this spring at the Sunshine Lavender Farm. More information will be emailed to the listserv. Victoria mentioned they would like to make

some updates to the website, to work on increasing social media presence, and other small changes that are in the works to help make us more connected. She also runs a small farmer's market on the UNC campus, if anyone is interested in opportunities to sell honey. There will also be some outreach campus events in April (for Earth Day). She will be sending more information out on the listserv. Robert also mentioned he has something in the works on how OCBA can promote agritourism as an outreach mechanism and also use it as a way to recruit more beekeepers and OCBA members. He is hoping to present his ideas at a future meeting, and also by email.

Door Prizes

The beekeeping supply company, Dadant, donated a j-hook hive tool and a smoker. Winners were 2 in-person attendees.

Next Month's Speaker

The speaker on April 13th will be Diane Currier, owner and head meadmaker of Honeygirl Meadery. Also presenting a short talk on their experience will be one of the 2022 OCBA apprentices (Ripley Florek). The second apprentice (Jasper Nunn) will be presenting at the June meeting.

Erika Wittchen
OCBA Secretary