

# Regional and Local Bee-Raising Concepts

*EAS has been inviting local, state, and regional cooperative queen programs to share their concepts and philosophies—specifically what they tried, what worked, and what didn't work. This issue highlights the Northern Bee Network and the Montgomery County Pennsylvania Local Queen Breeding. If your organization has a story to tell, please forward it to [journal@easternapiculture.org](mailto:journal@easternapiculture.org).*

## Local Queen Breeding in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

*Scott Famous and Vincent Aloyo*

The Montgomery County Beekeepers Association, located in Southeastern Pennsylvania, has recently initiated a local queen breeding program. Currently, there are not enough queen breeders raising resistant stock locally to provide a consistent supply for all who need them. Our solution is to educate and empower beekeepers to start raising better stock for themselves. Our program's goal is to provide the "know-how" and quality cells for participants to do exactly that: create resistant colonies that have a fighting chance at survivability, season-in and season-out, in our region of Pennsylvania.

We started our program by breeding from local stock and introducing quality queens from a variety of sources. Queen cells were reared from selected queens for distribution to club members. Participants are taught how to make "proper" queenless splits; care for their cells after pickup, including transport and placement in their new colonies; evaluate the cells for proper hatch or non-hatch; schedule visits for follow-on inspections and determine the success of the new queen's mating efforts or failure; and finally, provide vital feedback for the program. Participants, through ongoing participation in the cell program, take responsibility to provide their apiaries with all the quality queens they require, while improving bees' resistance to varroa-related diseases, productivity, and overwintering ability. By distributing cells to many apiaries, queens mate with local drones, thus enhancing genetic diversity.

Our program realized significant achievement in 2014, with many skills and lessons learned, many great queens reared, valuable data gathered, and a great deal of progress made by both the facilitators and participants. For 2015, we kicked off the new season with instruction and review during our March and April regular club meetings, so that club members are ready to prepare nucs for this year. As an additional incentive for members to participate in our breeding program, we offered low-cost nuc box setups to help offset expenses. Then, we began grafting from the best colonies that survived the winter and exhibited other desirable characteristics. Once again, queen cells will be distributed to club members for introduction into their queenless nucs. Furthermore, in 2015, we plan to expand our cell-making capabilities to meet increased demand and reach out to other bee clubs to share what we've learned, encouraging them to follow suit.

## The Northern Bee Network

*Meghan Milbrath*

Beekeepers in Michigan have taken a different approach to increasing the availability of quality queens. Many states are starting cooperative programs where beekeepers collaborate to raise queens that can survive in their area. In Michigan, we already have many beekeepers who are independently raising queens using their survivor stock. Many of these beekeepers were happy with their stock, had good survival, and had successful systems that they liked. Rather than focus on getting everyone to work together on developing new stock or methods, we needed a way to provide greater access to these already successful queens. The Northern Bee Network, [www.northernbeetwork.org](http://www.northernbeetwork.org), was designed to provide greater access to locally raised queens, and support for beekeepers looking to raise and sell their own queens and nucs. Initially funded by a kickstarter project and surviving on private donations, the web-based network provides free profiles of local queen producers and locally based beekeeping support.

Beekeepers looking to purchase a locally-raised queen can find someone near them on the map, and read their profile to see the strains and management methods. Many of these beekeepers previously had no web presence, so they are much more accessible to new beekeepers used to finding information on the internet. People selling queens or nucs get free advertising, and can use their profile as a web page (and can even direct the domain name of their choice there) so they can have a web page without having to set one up. Beekeepers contact queen rearers directly, and everyone can set their own prices and figure out the details of the sale independently. Individuals with any queens/nucs to sell (even 1) are encouraged to sign up so that others can have access to local bees.

The Northern Bee Network has other resources for beekeepers—it provides a comprehensive listing and map of bee clubs, listings of local classes and courses, provides contact information for local mentors, provides a forum for a queen/drone exchange, and coordinates bulk purchases of new queens. The program is expanding from Michigan, with listings in Ohio, Indiana, and Wisconsin, with more to come.