



Submitted photo

Beekeepers don protective suits when working with bees.



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Ron Bobo has talked about honeybees to many groups of children with what he calls a “live hive.”

BEES

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“They make just enough to eat and work,” Ron said.

When the fruit pollination is finished, the bees come back to Eastern Oregon where hives are placed in about 200 places around Baker and Union counties.

One hive consists of two boxes and contains 60,000 to 80,000 honeybees.

They place 24 to 32 hives at each location to pollinate local crops. In return, the Bobos share the final product with the farmers.

“We give them honey as a thank-you gift,” Carolyn said.

Summer is when the bees produce honey.

“Alfalfa and clover is my favorite honey,” Ron said.

To collect this golden liquid, the Bobos place extra boxes called supers on top of the hive. They aren’t accessible by the queen, so she cannot lay brood (eggs) in the honeycomb.

How, exactly, does a hive work?

Each has only one queen that lives for 4 to 5 years. The other bees are either drones (male) or workers (female).

The drones live for about 8 weeks and their only jobs are feeding the queen and breeding. Drones do not

have a stinger.

(If the life of a drone sounds simple, it doesn’t end well. Ron said two worker bees will pick a drone up by its wings, take it outside the hive, and stab it in the chest.)

The workers live for 6 to 8 weeks and spend their lives flying as far as 1 mile from the hive to collect pollen and nectar from flowers.

Back at the hive, the workers spit nectar into the honeycomb and mix it with pollen.

“They store it away, like we do in cabinets,” Ron said.

Other workers fan their wings to reduce the moisture content of the honey. Once it’s at the right consistency, the cell is capped with wax.

Not all queens are good. If she is not producing as she should, Ron said a beekeeper must kill the queen and replace her.

“Within seconds the whole hive knows the queen is dead,” Ron said.

The Bobos order 500 queens at a time. Each comes in her own box with a chunk of sugar and several worker bees. One queen costs \$50.

He said he can’t introduce a new queen right away. Instead, her box is placed inside the hive. She eats the sugar from one side while the hive’s

bees eat it from the other. Once they meet in the middle, the hive knows her scent and accepts her as their queen.

If a hive doesn’t have a queen, it will either die or raise its own queen — which may or may not be a good one.

“It’s a gamble,” Ron said.

Summer is honey time

During summer the Bobos and their employees check hives every one to two weeks to see if it’s time to pull honey.

“If you check the bees every day it hurts them,” Ron said.

Honey is processed in a sterile room. First, the honeycomb is uncapped with a heated knife. A spinner flings the honey out where it drips into a vat and runs through a tube.

They can fill nine to 10 barrels a day. Each barrel holds 55 gallons.

K&C Honey sells to Costco. It is labeled as “local Eastern Oregon honey.”

As with any agriculture business, honey production depends on the weather. Last summer, for instance, high winds often sucked moisture out of the plants which can affect the



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Summer is honey time in Baker Valley. K&C Honey sells most of its honey to Costco.

flowers and nectar, which in turn affects the amount of honey.

Paydays come only three times a year: one check for almonds, one for fruit, and one for honey.

Carrying on the business

Ron is a senior at Baker High School, and an active FFA member. Over the years he has presented about honeybees to students at

Summer Academy and kindergarten classes. This spring he will teach lessons at Keating School, depending on the schedule due to coronavirus.

He plans to make a career of beekeeping and honey production.

“I have good memories (of beekeeping) — that’s why I want to do it,” he said. “As far as all the careers I’ve discovered, beekeeping is my favorite.”