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Weather Watch

Cave Junction

Thursday, June 23
Partly Cloudy
High -- 73 Low -- 46

Friday, June 24
Clear
High -- 79 Low -- 47

Saturday, June 25
Clear
High -- 91 Low -- 52

Sunday, June 26
Clear
High -- 92 Low -- 53

Monday, Jun 27
Clear
High -- 94 Low -- 54

Tuesday, Jun 28
Clear
High -- 93 Low -- 54

Wednesday, Jun 29
Clear
High -- 90 Low -- 53

Following are the high & low temperatures, and rainfall recorded at The End of the Road in O'Brien by Cheryl & Harry Johnson:

Jun	High	Low	Rain
10	70.1	49.3	.00
11	73.6	43.2	.00
12	85.0	48.1	.00
13	72.8	46.0	.00
14	65.2	45.9	.02
15	64.4	34.4	.00
16	64.2	43.6	.34

Jun Rain: .36" YTD Rain: 88.60"

Diggin' Livin' bees buzz organically

By Dan Klapheke
IVN Staff Writer

The sound of a swarm of bees buzzing could be considered terrifying to some, but to Diggin' Livin', it's the sound of music.

Eric and Joy McEwen, owners of Diggin' Livin' Farm and Apiary, first moved to the Valley 13 years ago in search of affordable land and a good place to keep bees. But for Eric, originally from Montana, the passion started seven years before that at a small beekeepers talk in Eugene.

"They had some hives, and they let me stay after and put on a little mechanic suit they had and go out and work on the colonies with them," Eric said. "They just had maybe two hives in the community garden that they were helping pollinate the people's garden crops, and I just caught a fire."



(Photo by Dan Klapheke, Illinois Valley News)

Eric McEwen of Diggin' Livin' checks a hive Wednesday, June 15.

Eric spent the next three or four years learning and growing his interest before starting his first bee colony. Before that he was a professional botanist and performed contract work with the federal government for the Bureau of Land Management, which brought the McEwens to the Valley in 1999.

"We set off on a quest to kind of pursue a whole bunch of different interests," Eric said. "Anywhere from market gardening to raising animals, to bees, and try and create value out of goods from all the different things we were doing."

Eric said he and Joy initially struggled with produce, and learned they wanted a "shelf-stable" product.

"Trying to sell tomatoes is hard," Eric said. "We wanna be able to sell something that when it doesn't sell, you get to put it back in a box and take it home with you, and not just throw it on the compost pile."

Honey was the answer, Eric said, and they set out to commercialize their product. But growing organic for the McEwens means not using antibiotics or synthetic pesticides, and that sometimes ties their hands.

"Because of that we're struggling a little bit," Eric said. "And so we always attempt to grow, and then winter comes along and deals what it may, and sometimes it's a little hard."

Diggin' Livin' lost half its bees from last year, and Eric said the main problem is varroa mites.

"The varroa mite parasite is public enemy No. 1 when it comes to beekeeping," Eric said.

According to Eric, the varroa parasite first came to North America in the 1980s from the Asian giant honeybee, and it's now a worldwide problem. A healthy, thriving colony in an area nearly absent from pesticides and antibiotic residue, much like Diggin' Livin's bees, can collapse solely due to varroa mites.

After the mites, the bears are a problem.

"We like to keep bees in nice places, and that just means there's bears nearby," Eric said. "You can avoid bears more than we do by putting bees out in big, open fields near highways and stuff, but we like to be up in the smaller parts of the drainages sometimes, and try to stay near water, which means staying near woods."

Diggin' Livin' will lose 20 hives to bears in a bad year, Eric said, which is what happened last year. If the bees are tended to often and not neglected, the hives can be recovered and repaired quickly.

"Usually that means just one or two nights of it coming, or maybe that means three or four hives it eats up," Eric said, referring to bears. "But that's painful. They're worth a few hundred bucks a piece, so you don't wanna do that too often."

According to Eric, an average beekeeper in Oregon will spend \$100-\$200 per hive, and \$300 for a startup hive. For Diggin' Livin', each hive will produce \$200-\$500 worth of honey. They currently keep 175 honey-producing colonies, with 500 colonies counting hives that are being built up to produce next year.

For the fast-approaching honey harvest, Diggin' Livin' will collect up to 400 pounds in a day, totaling 3,000-4,000

pounds in a year. Due to a bad winter, Eric said Diggin' Livin' is taking a step back from honey production this year in order to recoup losses, and expect a moderate to small crop, but they're having success in what they do have.

A unique aspect to Diggin' Livin's beekeeping is their hive boxes, which they hand make in Takilma. They also have used boxes from other beekeepers, but what sets Diggin' Livin's apart is that the entire structure is wood with natural finish. Eric said they're in the process of converting the whole operation to handmade, and hopes to do so within the next year.

"We're really proud of it," Eric said.

Pat Meyer, originally from the Philadelphia area, has worked the bees with Eric and Diggin' Livin' for three years. He said he was terrified of bees as a child, but slowly eased into the practice.

"I eventually gained a very strong appreciation for the bees and how amazing they are and whatnot, and wanted to learn more about it," Meyer said.

Eric said he and Pat mainly take care of the hives, but Joy also helps when she's not running the store, and their children occasionally help as well. They sell the honey primarily in the Diggin' Livin' store, as well as a few wholesale accounts, but Diggin' Livin' is always trying to move forward.

"We definitely still hope to grow," Eric said. "We don't produce nearly as much honey and what-have-you as we'd like to, and yet, you know, I think we're getting there."



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