

# **BEES BEHIND BARS: VOCATIONAL BEEKEEPING TRAINING IN PRISONS**

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## **Abstract**

Education and vocational programs within prisons have been associated with improved behavior and reduced rates of recidivism (Sherman et al., 2003). Unfortunately, due to security issues and funding concerns, inmates have limited access to formal and informal learning opportunities. In order to address this issue, an educational and vocational beekeeping training program was established in 2013 at Lincoln Correctional Center (LCC) in Lincoln, Nebraska. The aim of the project is to provide meaningful science education in combination with vocational beekeeping skills to inmates and prison staff. This paper includes logistics, funding, and impacts so far.

## **Introduction**

In 1993, Lincoln Correctional Center (LCC) established an on-site farm. Crops grown at the LCC farm supplement the food supply of the Nebraska prison system allowing inmates to tangibly contribute to their food supply while gaining agricultural skills and decreasing financial costs to taxpayers. Partnering with LCC staff at the farm, the NU-BEE (University of Nebraska Beekeeping in Extension Education) Initiative aims to increase inmate vocational skills, provide hands-on science education, and assist inmates in reconnecting with nature during incarceration. The presence of honey bee colonies at the LCC farm also maximizes food production by providing adequate pollination for a variety of fruit, nut, and vegetable crops. Lastly, a portion of the honey produced from the LCC farm hives is given to the prison kitchen for use in inmate meals.

## **Logistics**

Gaining legal approval to place hives on-site took approximately one year (May 2012-June 2013). The project agreement was written by University and Corrections legal departments. The contract includes safety and security protocols, allowable interactions between inmates and presenters, and terms of the partnership (i.e. donation of the hives and provision of training, protective gear, and honey extraction services by the University and Corrections staff ensuring a secure training environment).

Prior to the first NU-BEE Initiative training in July 2013 at the LCC on-site farm, inmates were offered the opportunity via a sign-up sheet placed in each unit within the facility. Approximately 20 inmates and staff (with a 2:1 male to female ratio) took part in the training. Instruction included an introduction to bee biology and colony life history as it pertains to beekeeping management, appropriate protective gear and lighting of a smoker, hive examination, assembly of a bee hive, and understanding local versus allergic reactions to honey bee stings. Future instruction will also include pest and disease identification and treatment, honey harvest and extraction, wax processing, and explicit training in vocational skills such as teamwork, patience, record-keeping, and problem solving.

## **Funding**

The NU-BEE Initiative began with the donation of two colonies from Dr. Marion Ellis, former apiculture specialist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. All trainings were conducted by Erin Ingram, Marion Ellis, and two undergraduate assistants as part of UNL Extension efforts through the Department of Entomology. Continued cost of hive maintenance and trainings requires additional funding. Currently, the NU-BEE Initiative is seeking financial support through a “Reaching New Audience” grant from UNL Extension. This grant would support the purchase of beekeeping and extraction supplies, travel and transportation costs for presenters, and production of beginning beekeeping training videos to sustain LCC training and possibly expand training to additional facilities.

## **Outcomes and future directions**

Since 2012, the NU-BEE Initiative has established an apiary at the LCC farm and received legal clearance to conduct beekeeping trainings. Inmates have participated in basic beekeeping programming. Future trainings will expand to include more advanced management (including disease and pest identification, prevention, and treatment and honey harvest and extraction). Ninety-five pounds of extracted honey and 63 pounds of cut-comb honey were produced in 2013. This food product was given to the prison kitchen for distribution to correctional facilities in Nebraska. Future trainings will also focus on explicit vocational skills training as beekeeping supports the development of personal and professional values including a strong work ethic, patience, teamwork, problem solving, and respect for nature. These values will prove useful to inmates in a variety of work settings.

## **References**

Sherman, L. W., Gottfredson, D., MacKenzie, D., Eck, J., Reuter, P., & Bushway, S. (2003). *Preventing crime: What works, what doesn't, what's promising: A report to the United States Congress*. US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs Washington, DC.