

EXHIBIT

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Arkansas honey production jumps 35 percent in one year

By Ryan McGeeney

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Fast Facts:

Arkansas produced about 2.2 million lbs. of honey in 2017

Local honeys vary in color and flavor according to when they're harvested and where the bees are getting their nectar

(777 words)

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LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — Arkansas honey production leapt by 35 percent in 2017, reaching about 2.2 million lbs., a figure not seen in the state in at least a decade.

The data comes from a U.S. Department of Agriculture report, published earlier in March. The report only tracks honey production from sources that manage five or more bee colonies, and so largely excludes hobbyists or “backyard bee keepers,” said Jon Zawislak, extension apiary specialist for the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

The overall number of bee colonies in Arkansas, among producers maintaining five or more colonies, rose 21 percent in 2017, to about 29,000. Arkansas producers had stocks of about 223,000 pounds of honey by last year’s end, according to the report.

Across the United States, honey production involving five or more colonies fell 9 percent in 2017, to 148 million lbs. The USDA reported that production from operations involving fewer than five colonies dropped 22 percent, although it did not provide specific data for Arkansas.

While the estimated value of honey production in Arkansas — about \$4.27 million — is a relatively small slice of the state’s \$3.83 billion agricultural economy, it still serves as a reminder that there are many facets of working Arkansans’ efforts.

Katie Opris is co-owner of Brothers Honey Co. in Conway, Ark., which opened its doors in August of 2017. The business, which Opris runs with her husband and co-owner, Elvis Opris, is a boutique honey retailer that sells honey harvested from various locations across the state.

Opris said that most of the honey her shop currently sells is harvested in the central east and northeast areas of the state, although there are colonies throughout Arkansas.

“Right now, we have a lot of honey from central Arkansas, but a big part of that is simply because that’s where we ourselves are at,” Opris said that she hopes to bring in increasing varieties of honey from around the state as the business continues.

The USDA report tracks honey sales according to color class, ranging from “water white” to “dark amber.” Both Zawislak and Opris said the color reflects both the season in which the honey is harvest and where the bees are gathering their nectar.

“Early in the season, flowers tend to produce a very mild-flavored, light-colored honey,” Zawislak said. “As you get later in the summer and into the fall, they tend to be a little darker, a more robust flavor. There’s a real continuum in between, and it varies from area to area.”

“The spring pallet is a lot of fruit blossoms,” Opris said. “In the fall, it’s bitterweed, goldenrod and that sort of thing.”

The average price per pound of honey in Arkansas also increased slightly in 2017, from \$1.85 to \$1.91, although that likely doesn’t account for the state’s leap in production, Zawislak said.

“The price-per-pound goes up and down every year,” he said. “Nobody knows what it’s going to be, so they try to produce as much as they can, like any other farmer.”

For the past five or six years, Zawislak said, honey prices have varied between \$1.85 and \$2.04 per pound for commercial producers, who “don’t sell it a pound at a time at farmers’ markets. They put it in barrels and sell it by the pound.

“It’s like any other kind of farming,” he said. “You have good years and bad years.”

Zawislak said challenges facing beekeepers — whether professional or amateur — are similar to those facing any farmer.

“There’s parasites, there’s pathogens,” he said. “And pesticides are always a concern. It’s pretty challenging right now.”

Arkansas hasn’t been a “top 10” honey producing state in some time — in 2017, North Dakota alone produced more than 33.6 million lbs. of honey — something Zawislak attributes to changes to the industry, as well as society and agriculture more broadly.

“Converting wild areas to urban, agri, or recreational use can profoundly limit the forage flowers available to bees,” he said. He estimated that bees must visit about 2 million flowers to produce one pound of honey; as urban and agricultural areas expand, wildflowers and other historic sources of nectar are simply less available.

“In our state, we have large mono-cultures of rice and corn, which are wind pollinated, and soybeans and cotton, which can be self-pollinating. Excessive use of herbicides can further reduce the prevalence of wild plants in bloom for the bees.”

Zawislak said the best ways to support honey production in the state were to plant flowers to support honey bees and other pollinators, and to purchase local honey when available.

To learn about honey in Arkansas, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service agent or visit www.uaex.edu .

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The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture’s mission is to strengthen agriculture, communities, and families by connecting trusted research to the adoption of best practices. Through the Agricultural Experiment Station and the Cooperative Extension Service, the Division of Agriculture conducts research and extension work within the nation’s historic land grant education system.

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