

Start Thinking Spring by Cleaning Up the Dead Outs

Once again it is time to take stock of your honey bee colony losses and begin planning how many you will be replacing this coming spring. To improve the health of your new bees and improve your odds of success in 2020, consider taking part in the 13th annual PSBA spring hive irradiation decontamination program. We will be delivering our hive equipment to Sterigenics in Salem, NJ on the Monday morning of March 16th. In the past, beekeepers from all over the mid-Atlantic region, Massachusetts, and as far west as Cleveland Ohio have taken part. So far this year one beekeeper from West Virginia has signed up to take part.

For those of you not familiar with the program, it allows beekeepers to provide an improved health opportunity for new bees installed in used and dead out wooden ware by killing AFB and other pathogens that infect honey bees. The irradiation process eliminates the need to burn the frames and the contents of your hives plus you no longer need to scorch boxes or boil them in lye water. If you have never boiled hive bodies or hive equipment in lye; it isn't as easy as it sounds and is a bit risky for the person boiling the equipment.

For 2020, the minimum cost to have 1 to 7 pallets of material treated by Sterigenics in Salem, NJ is \$1,500 which breaks down to a per pallet cost of \$214.30. Every additional pallet of equipment beyond 7 will cost \$214.30 as well. On a 40"x 48" pallet can accommodate 42 deep and 6 medium 10 frame boxes with frames, foundation and comb. At \$214.30 that translates to \$4.64 per box. By way of comparison, based on 2019 Mann-Lake Ltd. prices to buy that same equipment new would cost \$2,576. Just the assembled frames with plastic wax coated foundation for those boxes would cost \$1,444, all without sales tax.

On a 40"x 48" pallet we can process 66 medium boxes. That breaks down to a cost of \$3.25 per box. Based on 2019 Mann-Lake Ltd. pricing that same equipment would cost you \$3,560.70. For the same amount of assembled frames with wax coated plastic foundation it would cost \$1,650, again without sales tax. No matter how you slice it, even with the cost of hauling the equipment added to cost of irradiation - it is cheaper to irradiate than buy new equipment.



For those of you who have taken part in the past there has been a change in the process at Sterigenics this year. We will not be allowed to stack and wrap our hive equipment in the parking lot as we did in the past. Therefore, you must deliver all hive equipment properly stacked and stretch wrapped for processing. All collected equipment must be stacked onto standard 48" x 40" pallets that are covered with a single large sheet of heavy gauge cardboard. Hive equipment may not extend beyond the edges of the pallet except for 1/2" on the 40" dimension of the pallet.

I encourage every local and regional beekeeping association to organize within that group to cooperate and pull the suspect, used, and dead out equipment of all the members together for treatment. It is best to designate a time and place to gather and palletize the equipment so everyone takes part. Each group needs find a person to haul the palletized hive equipment with a box truck, large pickup or utility trailer that has a gate that can be removed for forklift access. Then everyone taking advantage of the program can share all the transportation costs among those who contribute equipment on a per capita basis. The MCBA, BCBA, and CCBC have a person within the group that organizes the members and someone that hauls the equipment. Two years Paul Snellen did that for the LVBA. And Steve Fink the current president of the LVBA has done that for years as fee for service as part of his business Meadow View Beekeeping LLC. It is situations like this that make membership in a local beekeeping group really worthwhile. Because we have to stagger the delivery of the hive equipment if you plan to take part this year, contact me via e-mail at honeyhillfarm@verizon.net or by phone at (484) 955-0768.



The pallet and cardboard must be top sheeted with a single sheet of heavy 4ml plastic that has no pin holes. It must not leak! The plastic sheet must extend beyond the pallet on all sides by 12” so it can be wrapped up the sides of the stacked hive equipment before it is stretch wrapped.

All equipment must be tightly stretch wrapped, with the bottom and top sheet of 4 mil plastic tucked under the stretch wrap before processing by Sterigenics can occur. For the full instruction about the maximum height, pallet weight, labeling and more go to website of the Montgomery county Beekeepers Association at www.montocpabees.org Please join us and make sure you follow all necessary steps to prepare your equipment for processing.

The turnaround time to have the equipment treated is usually 3 – 5 business days. When the hive equipment is ready to be picked up Sterigenics will notify me and I will then send out an e-mail to everyone who delivered equipment that it is available to be picked up. Fortunately picking up the processed equipment does not require the same unified same day timing that delivering the equipment. So you can pick up your pallets of equipment on any week day for the next few days after it is ready.