

# FIRST STEP TO A SECOND CHANCE

## Beekeeping Education in Federal Prison



by JACOB KEITER

When one thinks about the individuals in the prison system and the beekeeping community, we hardly consider them relatable. Well, that's until recently.

In 2018 President Donald Trump signed the First Step Act for the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP), with the goal of reducing recidivism among federal prisoners. Within this bill it strongly encourages inmates to participate in programs within the prison. Due to this being a new bill, many programs were not immediately put in place, so inmates were encouraged to start up our own programs on topics we possess knowledge about, and want to share with others. Immediately a light bulb went off in my head; I can share the passion of Apiculture.

I began writing up the curriculum for the class and trying to figure out what all I can teach others from within here at the prison. After I finished writing up the course, I submitted it to the Education Department for approval. The staff looked at me like I was crazy for even proposing the idea to them, considering apiculture such an obscure topic of a class and that I would not have a very large turnout. After eventually persuading the staff that I already had an interested party ready to begin learning, they made the decision to approve it.

The class itself is not a vocational program sponsored by the prison or any outside source, but is considered an Adults Continuing Education (ACE) course. It's completely inmate run, by myself. Due to the circumstances of being incarcerated we are not able to physically possess bees, hives, or tools. This is a basic knowledge course to help spark the interest and passion within others. I pro-

vide examples from books and texts to share with others and have group discussions about major topics within the beekeeping world.

Whenever I first started my class, I expected a few people to be interested in this topic. What I ended up getting was a completely full roster of a very diverse group of individuals. Within my class there are people from the East Coast and West Coast, people of every ethnicity and racial background, and individuals of different religious preferences. Although we are all demographically and geographically diverse we all share the common passion of the art and science behind beekeeping.

The first question I asked my class was, "Why are you interested in honey bees?" I received several different answers, such as: to learn something new, to find a new hobby, to benefit the environment, and for profit. The differences in all our interests in beekeeping does not separate the passion within each of us to continue learning about it.

My current course discusses how to get started in beekeeping, the basics of management, honey bee biology, and honey bee products. Being in the BOP we all will be released to different parts of the United States so it's difficult to discuss specific seasons, plants, and techniques to use within each person's area. I try to individualize each person's learning experience during class and at times after class.

The course is eight weeks long, and we meet for two hours each week. After the duration of the sixteen hours is complete the class completes the program, and a new class moves in behind them.

I currently have a full roster, with a waiting list of others ready to join the next class. Within every one of these individuals I see a successful future beekeeper of America.

Thanks to a generous donation by the American Bee Journal, I have begun writing a new curriculum to continue teaching the class to students who have already completed the first program. I am excited to help them continue their studies in apiculture.

This just goes to show that the passion and love behind beekeeping can reach any individual in any circumstance.

**Jacob Keiter** is an inmate in a Federal Correctional Institution in Pennsylvania. He is also a beekeeping enthusiast who is trying to conserve the art of apiculture through new beekeepers.

This is an article I wrote for American Bee Journal published in June 2020 issue. First hand experience of how I created a program in the prison.