



Beekeeping, a Labor of Love

By Alexandra Gabrielski

What would make a nursing student suddenly want to become a beekeeper? The love of bees! Steven Keith is the beekeeper and hive manager for the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) Honey Bee Research and Extension Lab (HBREL).

Keith stopped pursuing a career in nursing to become a beekeeper out of his fascination with bees. It was a challenging journey and a huge leap of faith, changing from a career with assured job security to a career full of uncertainty. Keith had no idea that a simple trip to see some bee hives with a friend would have such an impact on his life.

“It was one of the most mesmerizing things that had happened to me because you’re standing in the middle of this field surrounded by dozens and dozens of bee boxes with literally millions of bees flying around you,” said Keith after reflecting on the experience of seeing the bees for the first time.

Keith respects his colleagues at HBREL and their commitment to their research into what bees need to thrive and how to protect them from disease, environmen-

tal toxins and habitat loss. He is thrilled to be a part of this program and passionate about maintaining bee health and promoting education about beekeeping.

Keith manages the 50 colonies at the lab, and those in the field for a total of 300 colonies!

“It gives the researchers, the ability to do more research and more grant writing and I can do the regular maintenance that honestly takes up most of the time when it comes to bee keeping,” Keith said.

Keith makes sure the bees at HBREL are happy and fed, the bee yards are maintained. He even has a mobile application on his phone that keeps track of hive information, especially those hives that are not doing well and need to be checked on. He also assists in collecting data and teaching students about beekeeping.

“That’s what so cool about this. I still get to do beekeeping, but I get to help the researchers do what they’re doing to help America’s beekeeping and so it’s really a unique position to be in. I am really excited to be here,” Keith said about his job.

Keith is concerned about the future of beekeeping, as beekeepers in the Florida are getting older and retiring. Keith encourages everyone to try beekeeping, even on a small scale. He feels that everyone can do their part to save the bees.

“Having a hive in your area, learning how to maintain it, is not as difficult as some people would say it would be. It’s honestly a very relaxing hobby to do.

But you don’t want to do it without doing research first because they’re still animals, they have immune systems, and you have to know how to treat them and love on them,” Keith said. For more information about bees, Keith and the HBREL, go to <https://entnemdept.ufl.edu/honey-bee/>



Steven Keith, Beekeeper -
Photo from HBREL