**Beekeeping Education**

The honeybee is man’s most useful insect, so that makes beekeepers very important indeed. Most everyone likes honey, but in terms of honeybees’ importance, honey and bees wax rank second in importance after pollination of other crops. According to the Food and Drug Administration, in 2019 there was a little over $339 million worth of honey produced in the US: while honeybee pollination accounts for about $15 billion in added crop value. Bee-pollinated crops contribute to approximately one-third of the total human dietary supply of food. Bees are considered significant pollinators due to their effectiveness and wide availability. For that reason alone, we should all have at least an interest in honeybees.

Honeybees face many more challenges now than they did 20 or 30 years ago. Diseases, pests, and in-part a loss of feeding habitat has caused a decline in wild pollinator and honeybee populations. Like all agriculture crops, severe drought and weather extremes also hurt populations and productivity. Diseases like American Foulbrood and insects like wax moths have been around forever and can be devastating to an apiary. However, we now have the additional threat of the introduced pest Varroa mite. The Varroa mite is considered the most serious threat to honeybee populations. While the challenges do sound a bit overwhelming, beekeepers are doing a very good job of learning new ways to control pests and disease and are doing a very good job of keeping the rest of us with a good supply of honey and important pollinators.

Do you have a thriving apiary, a single hive, or just an interest in beekeeping? If so, we have an opportunity for you to learn and visit with other beekeepers. The Comanche County Agents office and local beekeepers will be hosting an informal educational meeting for anyone with an interest in beekeeping. We will also be discussing the potential for a regular meeting of local beekeepers. The program will be held on Thursday, May 18th from approximately 6:30 PM until 7:30 PM at the Comanche Community Center. Beekeeping does require at least an elementary knowledge of honeybees, but depending on your goals you only need a few supplies, a location to keep a hive, and a desire to learn. If you have an interest, we hope you can join us. For more information or if you have questions, please call the county agents office at: 325-356-2539.