



White Mountain Apiary: New Hampshire Operation Growing According to Plan

BY MELISSA MOORE

Honey bees thrive in the bee yards owned by Janice Mercieri, owner of White Mountain Apiary in New Hampshire's North Country. Photo by Robert Blechl

When Janice Mercieri started with bees eight years ago in Littleton, New Hampshire, she never dreamed she would break out of the hobbyist ranks. Now she manages a commercially profitable operation on a much larger scale. Last year she extracted 3500 pounds of honey from 102 hives. Fellow beekeepers look to Janice for nucs, beekeeping supplies, bee packages, and guidance. Janice has steadily applied sharp business sense to White Mountain Apiary. These skills, combined with her passion for bees, are the building blocks of her sustainable business.

A written business plan is one essential ingredient. "It's the best way to monitor if you're meeting your goals," she said. "I refer to mine often to see the goals I've met or exceeded. My business plan also shows me where some things might have fallen through the cracks, and need attention." Her plan is available 24/7 on her mobile phone. The reporting features and accessibility make this tool indispensable. By constantly evaluating the relationship between projections and actual sales, Janice is able to stay on top of what's happening with her business.

All potential saleable products from the hive are part of the income stream. "It's good business to use everything from the hive," Janice said. "I don't steal from my bees. I use the excess, and from this I make the most of it." White Mountain Apiary offers honey products to both retail and wholesale customers. Her inventory also includes value added products such

as 11 flavors of infused honey, honey butter, protective salves, pollen, mustache wax styling balm, beeswax candles, and propolis tinctures.

This spring Janice expects to sell 100-125 nucs. A majority of these will be from overwintered nucleus colonies and the remainder will be spring splits. The honey bee population is a mix of Carniolan, Italian, Russian, Saskatraz, and Buckfast genetics. Janice is pleased to have captured a swarm of feral bees from a tree that had to be removed in nearby Dalton. These bees are true North Country bees since they have proven their

overwintering ability at 44 degrees latitude, and 915 ft. elevation.

Janice draws the line at pollination services. She has received requests in the past. However, experience proves that it's smart to be choosy about hive placement. The potential client may run a bee friendly farm. Yet there's no guarantee area land managers are using similar practices. She prefers to run bee yards in more isolated areas where the bees' exposure to chemical controls is minimized as much as possible.

She has found ideal locations in six area towns. The farthest hives are in



Janice Mercieri is shown here with some of her retail hive products on display at a popular coffee and tea shop. She is a business owner, strong advocate for bees, and conducts classes in northern New Hampshire and Vermont to spur interest in beekeeping and pollinator protection.



Janice Mercieri started out as a hobbyist beekeeper eight years ago. She has steadily grown her operation, White Mountain Apiary, into the sustainable commercial operation that it is today. Annually she manages 102 hives and in 2018 harvested a honey crop of 3500 pounds. Photo by Robert Blechl

Dalton, approximately 12 miles from their home base in Littleton. The hives in Bethlehem, Franconia, Whitefield, and Sugar Hill are all within a 10-mile radius. The hives in Sugar Hill are located at Tarnation Flower Farm. The bees thrive at this nectar and pollen rich site.

Each of these towns draws four-season tourists who enjoy the state's scenic White Mountains. Interest in locally produced products from this area is strong and helps drive robust retail sales. Honey and value added products from White Mountain Apiary are on the shelves at a host of local shops including the Littleton Food Co-op, Inkwell Coffee & Tea Shop, the Root Seller Marketplace, League of NH Craftsmen and other markets specializing in local products. Online sales and honey in 5-gallon containers to area restaurants round out her marketing strategy.

Janice added, "One of the nice things about Littleton is that area businesses network together and support each other. We do a lot of cross promotions throughout the year. The result is increased visibility for everyone who participates."

In April, the North Country Beekeepers Association (NCBA) will be the featured "Partners of the Month" at the Littleton Food Co-op. They ap-

plied for this opportunity last year and were accepted. A total of 28 nonprofits were in the running for the available openings. The top 10 choices voted on by the food co-op customers and employees were selected as partners. As NCBA president, Janice is especially excited about the opportunity to spread the word about honey and the importance of bees. Promotional flyers with bold headlines that read "Help Us — #Save the Bees" will be placed in all bags heading out the door. The flyers highlight the importance of bees as pollinators and describe 10 action steps homeowners can adopt to protect bees.

NCBA members will be on hand during shopping hours to answer questions. They expect to make an observation hive available to help with their talks. During the month, shoppers can round up their register bill and donate the amount to the NCBA. The NCBA will also earn funds from "Pizza for Partners" on Friday nights. During this promotion, \$1.00 from every pizza sold will go to their association. "We're going to wear our T-shirts with bee friendly slogans and our club gear and have a good time with this," said Janice. She is hopeful the additional funds will help their association sponsor future seminars and print additional educational

materials. The NCBA is New Hampshire's newest bee club, joining nine other active associations.

When you're all in for bees, advocacy and promotion comes naturally. Janice's message is clear. "Everyone can do something," she said. "Even if you're not going to keep bees, you can plant bee friendly plants or shop in a way that rewards eco-friendly businesses."

Strong advocates know that in addition to having a clear message, it's important to build relationships. Janice and her NCBA colleagues are frequent guests at the local radio station. The beekeepers use air time to promote local honey and pollinator protection. When invited, Janice is a frequent speaker at area museums, education centers, supply stores, and other bee clubs. In the winter months, Janice and her husband Joe lead beekeeping classes for those interested in managing hives. She said, "I couldn't do this all without Joe. Bee biology is a subject he loves to read about and share with our students." She encourages her students to be curious and never be afraid to ask questions. This is a strategy she has followed in her beekeeping journey. She started out working closely alongside her mentor, Geoff Gadappe. As she went along she continued to reach out to experienced beekeepers to help her increase her skill level.

Janice offered this advice: "Have confidence and don't be afraid to email or call an experienced beekeeper who can help you out. It's important to stay current with new research. There are online videos and blogs that are very helpful."

Janice continues to sharpen her skills by attending seminars and conferences. Previously, she and Joe participated in a 3-day intensive queen rearing seminar in Pennsylvania offered by Dr. Larry Connor. They attend EAS conferences and are active with the NH Honey Bee Diagnostic Network. At the end of this year, Janice is on track to complete her Cornell Master Beekeeping Certificate.

"There's never a down time," Janice said. "Even if there's snow on the ground, there are pallets to build and boxes to paint." She and Joe are gearing up for an expansion this spring. A commercial extraction line will be added to the operation. The upgrades will also include an automatic uncapping unit that will take all the cappings, spin out any residual honey, and render the beeswax nearly dry.



Janice Mercieri, owner of White Mountain Apiary, advocates for bees and pollinator protection. "Everyone can do something," she says. "Even if you're not going to be a beekeeper, you can plant bee friendly plants, and shop from eco-friendly businesses." Photo by Robert Blechl

They will break ground this year on a climate controlled storage building for overwintering hives. They follow the online videos of Ian Steppler, a beekeeper in Manitoba, Canada, who has experience with these types of structures. This building will help overwintering in the future, but one tool Janice calls indispensable right now is her FLIR ONE Thermal Imag-

ing Camera. "Going into the winter, the camera lets you know the size of the cluster and where it's located," she said. "The images make it so you know what's going on without having to get into your hive and disrupt it."

Over the years, Janice figures she has trained around 350 students in beekeeping. Not all of them have decided to keep bees, but at least they

have been educated about honey bees. She serves as a mentor to many new beekeepers, including a group of high school students at an area vocational technical center.

What's happening with mites and how to treat them is a beekeeper's challenge that has intensified with each year passing year. Janice said when someone calls and says they're having trouble, her first question is often, "What are your mite counts?" She has detailed mite control strategies to share that are adjusted for the beekeeper's skill level and degree of infestation. The strategies are built around the premise that monitoring is essential, as well as using a variety of control products to avoid resistance. Important IPM monitoring practices are sugar rolls and alcohol washes. Drone frames are also part of a good mite control program. The mites present in the capped drone cells will vanish upon drone frame removal.

Janice highlighted the research that tells us bees need to be good and "fat" before winter. Through the growing season, they need good forage, especially in early spring and fall. She has already purchased 200 lavender plants to settle into her bee yards for increased nectar and pollen. "When forage is short, feed them," she said. "They're our livestock."

According to Janice, "Bottom line to succeed in beekeeping, we need to be educated and know where our bees are at throughout the year."



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Melissa Moore has been a beekeeper for four years. She is a member of her local and state bee clubs. She has written for publication in the areas of horticulture, agriculture, and environmental science. Melissa has a degree in library science and educational technology. She lives on her family's 210-acre farm, where she gains hands-on experience through her involvement with their diversified farm.



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