

Time stands still in a Honey yard

As the slow methodical dance unfolds between the Apiarist and her hives, a drop of sweat slowly rolls down the back of her neck. Even at 40F in February, she knows that the actions she takes now can make or break this colony of 50,000 bees. The husbandry that she applies will provide liquid nectar in a few months time – a sweetener that has been cherished throughout thousands of years by the human race, and of course, wildlife.

She knows the health benefits after having carefully been instructed by a Veteran 'Keep – her father. At age 9, Astrid Sabo has been a Beekeeper more than half of her life and she knows that the careful precision she applies is appreciated by family who enjoy the benefits of her labor. She has rested on her belly in the spring to watch the ladies travel from flower to flower while collecting pollen and mused at their industry. And yes, she has been stung as she will be quick to tell you if asked.

She knows that farmer's crops, backyard gardeners vegetables, and commercial fruit orchards depend in large part to Honey Bees pollination. Being exposed to the environmental benefits and declining population of the little winged insects, she has become a steward in her own right of the land.

Somehow February 27th she found herself in Springfield, hours from home and the hives. She traveled with her father Mike Sabo and her younger brother to the Great Rotunda where legislative matters hum off the walls much as the bees fill the hive with their song. Beside her stands Senator Dave Luechtefeld, the Legislator that supports her in her effort to continue what she loves and has dedicated many hours of her life to. About to walk into the Senate Agricultural Committee, a bead of sweat slowly makes it's way down the back of her neck. This hearing covering SB 2959 could make the difference if Astrid, and indeed 95% of Illinois Beekeepers, can continue to keep hives.

She has dreams of selling at the local Farmers Market to support her hives, however current regulation prohibits the opportunity unless, as the Illinois Department of Health suggested at an after Committee meeting, she rent a commercial kitchen. The logistics of transporting such a delicate agricultural product must not be known to the IDPH. Nor the fact that Bees, like Astrid, are tenacious in guarding the comb from which the honey is removed and cannot be coaxed to stay behind while the honey travels to its final point.

In a time when Illinois Consumers are looking for fresh, locally produced products the question must be poised as to why such barriers are created between producers and consumers. How many times have individuals looked for a local product on the store shelves or Farmers Markets only to find imported products crowding out the items that could support the local economy?

If we want to keep the opportunity for the Astrid's out there in Illinois to provide a future for our Agricultural Industry, our Farmers Markets, and our toast with just a touch of nature's bounty – it is time to stand up and provide legislative requests of our Representatives. There are currently 3 bills related to the regulatory process of honey awaiting Committee Meetings or advancement to the floor in Springfield this year (SB 2959, HB 6132, and HB 5755). They have statewide sponsorship and true bi-partisan support.

I encourage each and every Illinois citizen who enjoys honey, and the affiliated items that can be produced with the by-products (candles, soap, wax), to support these 3 bills by contacting their State Senator and Representative.

Sharon Sabo