

The Beez Kneez

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Thank you Madame chair for allowing us to come today and share with the committee our story. My name is Kristy Allen and this is my business partner, Erin Rupp. Together, we run a small beekeeping business called the Beez Kneez, LLC. The Beez Kneez is working for Healthy Bees, Healthy Lives through bicycle-delivered honey sales, education, beekeeper support services, and pollinator advocacy. Before we talk about the pesticide kill that we experienced last fall alongside Katherine and a third urban beekeeper named Mark Lucas, we would like to give you a brief history as to how and why the Beez Kneez exists.

In 2009, I went to work for my aunt and uncle at their commercial honey and pollination business in Squaw Lake, MN. Before I even went to their ranch, I was certain I wanted to be a farmer someday but had no idea how much I wanted to be a beekeeper until I stepped into a bee suit for the first time. I finally found something that filled me with passion. From that moment on, I was hooked and decided to learn as much as I could by reading books, and picking his brain of 35 years experience. Along the path of learning about beekeeping, I discovered the important role that honeybees and other pollinators play in our food system and that they were dying, threatening not only the very passion I aimed to pursue but more importantly, something we all share, access to healthy food.

In my second year at Bar Bell Bee Ranch, my aunt asked if I wanted to sell their honey in Minneapolis. A light bulb went off and a marketing idea was born that combined my new passion with an existing passion, bicycles and a way I could tell the world that bees were in trouble.

So in response to my aunt's question, I painted my bike black and yellow. On Halloween I dressed to resemble a bee, effectively drawing attention to my business. I started delivering honey to people's homes and at farmers markets. I was a mobile advertisement not only for selling honey but at the same time drawing attention to bees and the fact that they were dying. In that first year, I learned something very important. People wanted to know about bees and why they were dying. I realized quickly, we needed to educate.

That year, I met educator Erin Rupp on a farm near Stillwater where we were both keeping our own hives. We started talking about the need for education, especially for kids and adults who live in the city and are disconnected to their food. She had a really great idea to bring kids and adults into hives, give them the hands on experience we both loved so much as a way to do that very important connection work. *We received a grant from Hennepin County Environmental Services through the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the*

Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR).), We bought some bee suits and were gifted some equipment from Mann Lake. We placed hives at urban farms, community gardens and schools and started teaching classes in and around Minneapolis. We did education events all over the Twin Cities at places like the State Fair, the Pollinator Party, local schools and many more.

In 2013, we grew to managing a total of 50 hives between urban sites and rural farm sites.

After our second year delivering honey and teaching classes, we realized we needed a space of our own and saw an opportunity to serve the rapid growth of hobby beekeepers. So in April of 2013, we raised \$40,000 to open the Beez Kneez Honey House. A place we could do our day to day operations as well as a place for other beekeepers to use and build our community around beekeeping. In August of 2013, we extracted over 2000lb's of honey by bicycle.

Then in September of 2013 we experienced this bee kill. Before I transfer the floor to Erin, who will share with you more about the bee kill and why we are hear today, I would like to say one last thing. When I started the Beez Kneez 4 years ago, I could have never imagined that it would lead me here. When I started, all I knew was that I wanted to make a living as a beekeeper. What I didn't know when I started, was that in order to be a beekeeper these days you need more than books, uncles with 35 years of experience, clever marketing ideas, or a supportive community to be successful. You need to ask your government to help protect your bees from pesticides.

Thank you Madam Chair and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today.

-Erin Rupp, erin@thebeezkneezdelivery.com

As Kristy said, one thing we do is offer in hive experiences to connect people to bees. Have you all been in a beekeeping suit working a hive before? It's fun, it's empowering, it's an amazing learning opportunity. Honey bees are an incredible teaching tool, and provide a direct point of connection to science and other subjects- math, social studies, history. With honey bees pollinating 1/3 of everything we eat (fruits, vegetables, nuts) they provide a direct connection between students (in our case urban students) to agriculture.

With Blake we were working with high school students who were then teaching 3rd graders.

This is our hive that was killed.

It's sad to lose those bees and these class opportunities this fall and spring. It was extremely sad to see those bees dying. As a business, we lost the revenue we would generate from those classes. (and from the honey those bees would produce)

It's also pretty lucky- that we caught them as they were dying, that we live in the same town as the UofM Bee Lab and Bee Squad: these are folks who know what a pesticide kill looks like, how to sample bees, and where to send them to find out what killed them, and are available as a resource to help. We need the U of M Bee Lab, which you all have an opportunity to support this bonding session. We are urging you to do so.

Out of our investigation, we now know that structural and landscape pesticide applications kill bees. We know now that a systemic pesticide, though not a neonic, likely applied legally, kills bees.

We launched the Healthy Bees Healthy Lives campaign with other beekeepers, business owners, politicians, and citizens, with scientific expertise from the Bee Lab and Bee Squad in response to this kill we experienced. We're connecting people to individual action steps for pollinators- planting flowers and eliminating pesticide use on their lawns, asking nurseries and hardware stores if plants are pretreated with neonics, and urging people to talk to you, to share their concern for pollinators. Because, we need more than individual action steps to address problems like this kill.

Many people share our concern; we've had a packed room at our campaign launch, over 300 people have pledged not to use pesticide their own backyards. We have seen an outpouring of support for the work we're doing... for the work you can do.

We're asking for concrete things from you -

1. Transparency in pesticide applications- make application records public.
 - a. Both as driftwatch does- pre spray,
 - b. And as the state of CA does, post spray.
2. Labeling pesticide products that kill bees, making it easier for the consumer to make informed choices.
3. Form a pollinator response team moving forward, if another kill does happen, being better equipped to be able to enforce laws and protect livelihoods like ours.
4. Restricting sale of Fipronil as NY CT, AK, MA have, which on it's label, requires a *toxicology license to apply*, but is available for purchase online.

Historically, Minnesota has been an amazing state to be a beekeeper. We have been one of the top honey producing states in the country; the largest beekeeping supply company in the world is based in Hackensack. We are the state where beekeepers brought their bees to eat, to be healthy. We're also know as a state that cares for our ecosystems- we have large communities of hunters, fishers, farmers; 10,000 lakes, the Boundary Waters.

A growing number of your constituents are beekeepers. Your constituents are farmers, are gardeners, are enjoyers of ecosystems with flowers. And- all your constituents are eaters. Guaranteed! Kristy and my livelihood depends on you expanding your good work for pollinators to include our recommendations on pesticides. So maybe you care about us and make decisions to stop a kill like this from happening again. But just as likely, you care about your constituents. And your families. You have the direct ability to help pollinators continue to provide the fruits, vegetables and nuts that make up a nutritious diet that we all need to be healthy, that we all need in order to have livelihoods.

We know that pollinators need our help- and this pollinator habitat bill is such an important step. We, as beekeepers, as business owners, as people who eat, as proud Minnesotans, we would love to see MN continue to be a national leader on this issue.

You all have that capability. I want to applaud you for the amazing work you've already done and the work you'll continue to do.

We're submitting these documents for the record.

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