



Background

The N. C. Master Beekeeper Program (MBP) is the oldest, continuously active program of its kind in the country. Established in the fall of 1982, its purpose is to provide an infrastructure whereby beekeepers can improve their beekeeping skills and knowledge on a continuous basis within a system that objectively and formally acknowledges those accomplishments. It also serves as a means of providing valuable information to beekeepers and the public through various outreach services.

The MBP is a joint venture of the North Carolina State Beekeepers Association (NCSBA), the N. C. Department of Agriculture (NCDA), and the Apiculture and Cooperative Extension programs at the North Carolina State University (NCSU). Any resident of North Carolina with an interest in bees is invited to participate in the program, which is currently free of charge. Non-residents are also encouraged to take part, although no special arrangements will be made for testing or other programming outside of the state.

The MBP consists of four ascending levels of beekeeping expertise. The *Certified* level is the entry level of the program for participants with basic knowledge of honey bees and bee management. The *Journeyman* level are beekeepers with demonstrated competence in the craft. The *Master* level beekeeper should be able to function as a sideline or commercial beekeeper, if he or she desires, and have some expertise in several sub-specialties of apiculture. The *Master Craftsman* level is the highest attainable in the program, and is reserved only for those participants who have demonstrated excellence in teaching, public service, and honey bee management skills.

Each successive level requires that certain minimum criteria be met, which are summarized below.

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Level	TESTS			SERVICE AND EXPERIENCE		
	Written	Practical	Oral	Beekeeping Experience	Public Service	Other
Certified	✓	✓	-	-	-	-
Journeyman	✓	✓	-	2 years	5 units	-
Master	✓	✓	-	3 years	10 units	1
Master Craftsman	✓	✓	✓	2 years @ Master level	15 units	1, 2, 3

1 = Demonstrate expertise in sub-specialty; 2 = Present a program at an NCSBA annual meeting; 3 = Participate in an NCSU-sponsored research project

Becoming a participating member of the MBP requires knowledge of honey bees and beekeeping in three basic, interdependent subject areas.

1. Honey bee biology. Honey bees are living, breathing animals. Therefore it is critical that beekeepers obtain a fundamental understanding of honey bees as a biological system. This includes understanding their nest architecture, development, anatomy, genetics, behavior, ecology, and evolution. Understanding what bees do naturally facilitates their husbandry by working *with* them, rather than *against* them. Moreover, understanding their biology develops a deeper appreciation and admiration of the bees.
2. Honey bee management. Based on a thorough understanding of honey bee biology, a beekeeper may then effectively manipulate honey bees in a managed setting. Subjects include how to properly keep bees and what *not* to do. Hive construction, beekeeping equipment, and apiary establishment are also important areas of understanding. Treatment and prevention of the many diseases that afflict honey bees is also a significant management issue.
3. Honey bee industry. Managed honey bees in the US account for over \$14 billion each year in pollination services and increased crop yields, and thus is a vital part of the agriculture industry in the country. Knowing the history of beekeeping, what crops require bees for cross pollination and fruit set, the honey market, and the uses of other hive products are important aspects of the apiculture industry.

The purpose of the program is to increase simultaneously the breadth and depth of knowledge within each of these areas, and to reflect that understanding back to other beekeepers and the public. Participants are objectively assessed and recognized for these valuable endeavors.

To enroll in this *free* program, or to gain more information on the N. C. MBP, call your local county extension agent, NCDA inspector, or visit one of the following web sites:

NCSBA: <http://www.ncbeekeepers.org/master.htm>

Apiculture Program at NCSU: <http://entomology.ncsu.edu/apiculture>