

How Sweet It Is

As always, the first week of January starts off with a bang as I head down to the PA Farm Show and assist the Pennsylvania State Beekeepers Association (PSBA) in set-up of the Apiary Exhibit. The two days consist of setting up the display and educational area, accepting honey product entries, and assisting the judges. The exhibit is a great way to get a feel for the art and science of beekeeping.

A portion of the exhibit allows individual beekeepers to create a display that promotes honey, bees, wax, or pollination. Knowledge is incorporated with eye-catching art. There is an opportunity for the local beekeeping clubs to pool their knowledge and skills and entry team displays. With this competition, apiary products from at least five beekeepers from the local club must be incorporated into the exhibit. Individuals and the clubs are both judged.

But the most eye-catching part of the whole apiary exhibit is the honey products. This runs the gamut of extracted honey, comb honey, baked goods, beeswax, and mead.

It is always interesting to check-in the extracted honey. Depending on the floral source, honey colors can vary from extremely light to dark. I usually ask the question to the beekeepers on what plant were the bees working. To me, the most unique honey I saw checked in this year was an extremely white honey that came from lamb's ear, an ornamental perennial that has velvety soft, wooly evergreen leaves.

If a judge, it is a good rule of thumb to not eat a large breakfast. Extracted honey submissions are tasted as they are partially judged on flavor. But this also holds true for the baked goods (must include at least 25% honey as a sweetener) section. While it may look good, there are a large number of points attributed to eating quality (that may include taste, texture, and aroma).

It is always interesting to observe the judging of the mead (honey wine). The judges use a pretty long scorecard and take in factors such as flavor balance, acidity, body, and aroma. I don't know much about wine, but I learn a lot just listening to the discussion that occurs after tasting each entry.

And if you see something that catches your eye in the display area, head over to the PA Marketplace. Here, Pennsylvania honey is sold in various quantities and flavors (such as knotweed, lamb's ear, locust, buckwheat, and wild bergamot).

If you have the time, take a whole day (you will need a whole day to see the whole show and eat some local fare) and head down to the PA Farm Show. It runs until this Saturday.

Captions:

Baked - baked goods line the shelves, ready for judging. They must include at least 25% honey as a sweetener.

Club display – The North Western Pennsylvania Beekeepers Association educational display that displays beekeeping products

Honey color scale – extracted honey is placed in several categories, from white (far left) to dark amber (far right)

Honey – honey line the display shelves, ready for judging

Marketplace – Beekeeping products are available to Farm Show attendees that want a taste of Pennsylvania

Mead – Mead competition is open to amateur mead producers only. Honey must be 75% of the base of the mead and the type of honey used must be noted on the entry form (wildflower is permissible)

Wax – beeswax is judged several ways, from block (left) to molded or designed (right)