



## Media Release

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### **Ernst Conservation Seeds Hosts NW PA Beekeepers Association Queen Bee Improvement Project**

Meadville, PA – June 23, 2020 – In a fitting kick-off to Pollinator Week, taking place June 22-28, Ernst Conservation Seeds hosted members of the Northwest Pennsylvania Beekeepers Association (NWPBA) for its annual queen bee improvement day on Saturday, June 20.

“The honeybee parasitic mite, varroa destructor, has been a plague since arriving in the early 1990s,” said Charlie Vorisek, president of the association and owner of Vorisek’s Backyard Bee Farm in Linesville. “Removing a bug from a bug, while protecting a food source, is challenging,” he continued. “Since colony collapse disorder appeared in 2006, the industry has largely shifted from synthetic to more organic control methods. These require more frequent, accurate dosages.”

Yearly honeybee losses in Pennsylvania still average around 40-50%. A concerted effort is underway for a solution without chemical intervention. Studies have identified some honeybees with the hygienic ability to rid themselves of these parasites.

NWPBA, in partnership with Pennsylvania State Beekeepers Association, Penn State Center for Pollinator Research and Purdue University, have hosted a queen improvement project field day for the past six years. This season, the group is stepping up the project. About 100 colonies (owned by Vorisek’s Backyard Bee Farm) located throughout Ernst Seeds’ native flower seed production fields between Meadville and Cochranon were re-queened with the improved genetics last summer.

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Queens require a mating flight over several miles, where they mate with approximately 20 drones. This concentration of selected genetics speeds the evolution that would otherwise take generations. Despite needing to cut back the event due to COVID-19 concerns, Ernst Conservation Seeds hosted the group, providing a site for breeding more of these genetics, affectionately nicknamed “leg-biters’ and ‘mite-maulers’. Beekeepers brought queen-less starter colonies to the site, where a newly hatching queen was installed in the hive. These will remain on site until the new queen is mated. The beekeeper will now have a hive with the improved genetics to take home to their locations.

While not yet a solution, Vorisek believes this is a positive step in changing the honeybee population “neighborhood” and promoting sustainable beekeeping.

For more information on the Northwest Pennsylvania Beekeepers Association and its queen bee improvement project, visit <http://www.nwpabeekeepers.com/> or contact Charlie Vorisek by email at [vbeefarm@windstream.net](mailto:vbeefarm@windstream.net) or by phone at 814-350-0662.

For more information on Ernst Conservation Seeds, visit [www.ernstseed.com](http://www.ernstseed.com) or call 800-873-3321.

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