

NEW DELAWARE STATE APIARIST

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Photo Caption:

Bob Mitchell, retired DE apiarist at field day. Public outreach duties are part of DE State Apiarist duties

Delaware has hired a new State Apiarist, Meghan McConnell, a native of Millville, NJ. She is a 2012 graduate of the University of Maryland (UMD) with a bachelor's degree in Environmental Science & Technology. Meghan currently is finishing her MS in Entomology at the University of Maryland under Dr. Dennis van Engelsdorp. Her research targets *Varroa* mites, specifically non-chemical controls and horizontal transfer.

Prior to returning to school for her graduate degree, she interned with the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service, for 10 months working with invasive plant species, submerged aquatic vegetation and pollinators. She also worked for a short time at the University of Maryland, Institute of Applied Agriculture as an Undergraduate Technology Apprentice. In 2012, she joined the Bee Informed Partnership (BIP), the University of Maryland. She was part of the Real Time Disease Load Monitoring project that surveyed colonies for bee health, *Nosema* and *Varroa* levels in backyard, sideline and commercial beekeeper apiaries.

With the Bee Informed Partnership, she gained practical beekeeping experience rapidly while working with colonies in all types of operations including those of the UMD apiaries. She has produced many outreach materials with BIP and in addition, she has given bee talks to diverse groups such as the International Congress of Entomology Meeting in Orlando FL, the International Pollinator meetings at Penn State, a Smithsonian Symposium, EAS 2016 conference (where she was Honorable Mention runner-up as the EAS Student award) and bee groups in FL, WV, NJ, CA, MD and TX. She has spoken at the last two American Bee Research Conferences, held in conjunction with National January bee meetings.

She was also recognized in 2016 by the American Beekeeping Federation as a Foundation for the Preservation of Honey Bees Scholar.

Meghan will be replacing Bob Mitchell who has been Delaware's State Apiarist for the last 31 years, retiring last fall. Bob began his own bees in 1972 to pollinate crops on his family's Century Farm and expanded to over 200 colonies at one point to provide pollination for the watermelon growers of southern Delaware. He was the longest serving apiary Inspector, a program that has been a full-time effort of the Delaware Department of Agriculture since 1975. Bob became the State Apiarist in 1985 when the position was upgraded from Bee Inspector. With retirement, he plans to devote more attention to his bees.

The very first season on the job, Bob found the first tracheal mites in Delaware and later reported the first Varroa mites (1994) and Small Hive Beetle (2001) invaders into the state. He maintained an ETO chamber for foulbrood eradication for many years, salvaging hundreds of drawn frames, bee boxes, tops and bottoms for beekeepers. With most of the 5000 colonies needed to pollinate cucurbit fields (watermelon, squash, and cucumbers) coming from out-of-state migratory operations, Bob found the challenge of servicing the commercial beekeepers, growers and the locals, who have had a strong roadside market for their products, a challenging aspect of his inspection and educational efforts to keep AFB, and later varroa mites under control. With concerns that shipping containers would bring Africanized bees into the state, he maintained a vigorous swarm trapping program in the Delaware Bay anchorage and ports of Wilmington and Delaware City.

Bob was one of the founding members of MAAREC (Mid-Atlantic Apiculture Research and Extension Consortium), established in DE in 1996 and was twice VP of EAS (1986 and 1997). He received the EAS Divilbiss award (2007) for his outreach to schools, his State Fair and State Agricultural museum efforts, his work with the Boy Scouts and his effort to assist prison farm inmates and technical high school students with developing beekeeping skills. He oversaw two significant updates to the Delaware Apiary law during his tenure.

With Bob's retirement and Meghan finishing her thesis at UMD, the Delaware State Apiarist position has been and will continue to be filled this spring by Richard Goerger. Dick was the Delaware State Bee Inspector for 6 years (1969-1976) before moving to the DE Department of Agriculture Seed Lab. He was supervisor of the Seed Lab before retirement in 2009. After his retirement, he came back to DDA as a part-time employee. He primarily assisted Bob Mitchell with apiary inspections, and collected Delaware's samples for the USDA -APHIS Honey Bee Health Survey in 2011 and 2016. He has served as Acting State Apiarist since Bob's retirement and will continue in this capacity until Meghan assumes full-time duties in May.

The Delaware State Apiarist position involves numerous duties varying from inspection of bee colonies to regulatory support of the Delaware apiary laws (<http://delcode.delaware.gov/title3/c075/>) The State apiarist actively conducts surveys for early detection for the presence of honey bee parasites and is responsible for securing samples of suspect colonies including lab analysis, recommending treatments, imposing quarantines and ...