



Georgia Beekeepers Association

Serving Georgia's Bee Industry for over 90 Years

Gwinnett County Zoning Board

20 May 2014

The purpose of this letter is to encourage you to support Beekeeping as a hobby within Gwinnett County

My name is Clay "Bear" Kelley and I am the President of the Georgia Beekeepers Association, a Certified Beekeeper and a member of the American Bee Federation. We have about 2,500 Beekeepers in Georgia and that includes folks who live in and around Atlanta, and the surrounding counties. Our purpose is to promote the education of beekeeping and we do so with free public classes annually; by visiting schools throughout the state discussing the importance of the honey bee; supporting the state's 4-H program and by supporting financially, the bee research lab at the University of Georgia. Furthermore our members operate the honey bee booths you see at the Georgia National Fair and numerous farmers markets throughout the state.

Beekeepers have been around for centuries and have been an integral part of human society, agriculture and a food source provider. So much so, that more than one third of what we consume as humans is a result of the pollination conducted by honey bees.

Honey bees by their nature are gentle and easy to work with. They will only sting someone in defense of the colony or in self defense, after which they will die. As opposed to hornets, yellow jackets, wasps, bumble bees and such that can and will sting multiple times. The difference is that honey bees are vegetarians and the others are carnivorous and use their stingers to kill their prey. Hollywood has dubbed the "Africanized honey bees" as "killer bees" and thereby set fear in the average person's mind that all bees will aggressively attack you. That is simply not true. It is true however, that the Africanized honey bee is more aggressive than the gentle European honey bee, the bee of choice for all beekeepers. Currently, there are no known Africanized honey bee colonies in Georgia. Georgia Beekeepers are ever vigilant and watchful for evidence of the Africanized honey bee in our local areas.

They are essentially the first line of defense. To restrict beekeepers from the Gwinnett County will take away that first line of defense and allow feral colonies to come in and thrive in all neighborhoods.

In addition to the early warning system that European bees provide, they also pollinate the many flowers and gardens throughout the year that the citizens of Atlanta enjoy. Flowers with their brightly colored petals and enticing nectar depend on bees to distribute their pollen to other like minded flowers, while bees depend on the pollen and nectar for food. It is fair to say that one would not survive without the other. Without them, our shrubbery would only be “green”.

Local Honey is another benefit, or product, that bees produce. An average healthy hive can produce up to 100 lbs of honey annually. The benefits of local honey are too numerous to list, but America is experiencing a national shortage of honey. Hence the Chinese are importing vast amounts of tainted and adulterated honey into our markets. The USDA has caught them on numerous occasions, but doesn't have the man power to control the importation of cheap honey that has been cut with corn syrup and had unauthorized chemicals added. To restrict honey bees, would cause another American commodity to be taken over by countries like China. Buying honey at the local market is what most Americans prefer and when they see a local label, they can depend on receiving all the benefits that local honey has to offer.

The city of Perry, Georgia recently faced the same situation with their citizens and after much discussion, solved the problem by allowing 1 hive per quarter acre within the city limits. Many other municipalities and communities throughout the United States have done the same, including New York City , The White House and our own State House. I realize that we don't care what goes on in New York, but a city with such a dense population has found beekeeping to be a safe urban and suburban practice, why can't we? Georgia is an agricultural state. The old money and new money has been earned by the sweat of the farmers. It is our culture, tradition and way of life. Please take the time to carefully consider this situation and consider its impact on such a large part of our state's population and interest.

If during the process, I can be of any assistance, please feel free to call on me.

Respectfully submitted,

Clay “Bear” Kelley

President, Georgia Beekeepers Association.

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