

## **New Bee Farm Vows to Break with Convention**

### *Part 1*

Cynthia McMurray

In today's fast-paced, high-tech and typically, profit-driven society, new is not always better, according to Dr. Henry Svec, licenced psychologist, founder of ExerciseMD, real estate developer and more recently, self-proclaimed 'bee-helper.'

"I don't like the inference of the word 'beekeeper,' I like to think I am helping the bees more than 'keeping' them," he explains about his philosophy for Wildflower Bee Farm, set to launch in Blenheim, Ontario this spring.

While the Svec family has actually lived on the 50-acre farm for 57 years now, this newest endeavour is sure to create a 'buzz' within the industry, or at least that is the goal, says Svec, who adds that every day researchers learn more and more about the plight of bees around the world and the growing list of repercussions that has on our ecosystems.

Over the past 100 years or so, Svec says the farm, which sits on some of Ontario's richest soil, was a fruit orchard, growing cherries, peaches, plums, apples and grapes. In 1995, the first 15 acres were turned into bush, including ash, maple, oak, pine and walnut trees.

"We also established two large farm ponds over the years, initially to be used as irrigation and water backup storage, but they are now proving to be an integral part of the bird and wildlife habitat," he says.

In the past seven or eight years, the remaining orchards were eventually replaced by a cash crop operation and a solar generation system, feeding power back into the grid. "But now, we are turning our farm over to the bees," Svec proudly announces. "So the entire 50-acre farm

will consist of 15 acres of bush with two large ponds and endless fields of beautiful wildflowers and clover, with an ultimate goal of creating a sustainable operation that includes more than one-million bees.”

Svec says that by adding a million bees to the habitat, it will not only have a dramatic impact on the ecology, health and longevity of the environment, but ultimately, the health and more importantly, the happiness of the bees.

When the bee farm officially launches spring 2020, Svec explains it will also be making a significant impact on the environment by offsetting its carbon footprint. “By planting native wildflowers and clover, as well as the 15 acres of dense trees and bush we have, we will be able to sequester up to almost 54 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year.

So, how will the Wildflower Bee Farm differ from conventional bee farms? “There are a number of things we are going to do differently,” says Svec. “Traditional beekeepers (using modern acceptable methods) tend to use pesticides or various antibiotics, but we are not going to do that. We are also going to encourage our bees to swarm. Swarming is something that a lot of bee keepers have sort of gotten rid of because if you allow your bees to swarm, you are going to lose some of your honey,” he explains. And less honey obviously means less profit, something that doesn’t typically bode well for commercial operations.

While Svec has a pretty healthy list of ways he intends to do things differently for his bees, there are a few things he was eager to highlight. The first was to provide the bees with a natural, supportive environment that meets all of their needs so they are able to safely stay on the farm.

“Right now, we have a small group of bees I started three years ago. We will launch the business in the spring and within three years, we hope to reach our goal of having more than one million bees,” he says. And to house the bees, Svec says he intends to provide them with a variety of places to call home, including traditional Langstroth hives, top bar hives and a number of unique designs he had crafted by hollowing out tree logs, something that mimics what bees normally do in nature — find a dead log and make it into a hive. He says that log hives are not in and of themselves unique to the industry, but how they are crafted is.

“On many bee farms, the entrance to regular hives are made quite large, so it is easier for the bees to produce more honey. But I disagree with this because the bees then have to have actual guards to protect that entrance. So, if you have a hive that has a 6-inch entrance [for example], the bees have to have enough guards to protect that entrance because they will be susceptible to attack by robber bees, wasps and mice,” he explains. “In nature, no bee is going to choose a log with a huge entrance, which is why our log hives have a one-inch entrance, so in the summer, the bees only have to go through that little entrance and the only other hole in the log is a small hole for air,” he explains.

Interestingly, Svec believes that bees are much like us when it comes to anxiety. “The anxiety level in a bee hive, the nervousness (fear of threat) causes them to become unhealthy, just like in humans. So by forcing the bees to always be on guard, it raises their anxiety level. This is one example of something that can be very simply helped by just providing the bees with an appropriate hive.”

While a small entrance may be ideal and undoubtedly safer for the bees, it challenges the belief that you need a large entrance to maximize honey production, Svec says. If that is true he feels sacrificing honey production for the better health of the bees is a necessary trade off.

To find out how he plans to meet this unique challenge and some of the many other ways in which the Wildflower Bee Farm will differ from conventional bee farms, make sure to check out part two of the story next week on the farm's new website at [WildflowerBeeFarm.com](http://WildflowerBeeFarm.com) or on their Facebook page — Wildflower-Bee-Farm.