



**THIS SWARM OF BEES** is ready to enter the hive. Once they find the entrance to the new hive they will move right in and begin life in their new home . . . that is until it becomes too crowded and part of the hive decides to move on to new quarters.



**TRYING TO FIND THE QUEEN BEE** as the swarm of bees enters the hive is like hunting for a needle in a haystack to the untrained eye. To the Bellins it's all in a day's work.

### Employ Millions In Local Industry

If anyone had told me that I would stand in the midst of 100's of angry, buzzing bees, letting them crawl on my hat and veil, I would have told him he was crazy.

But that's exactly what I did at the Bellin Honey Farm. I hadn't been there more than two minutes when someone yelled, "Hurry up, they're going to swarm!"

Mrs. Bellin told me to run—that this was something I should see. Running seemed like a good idea and that's just what we did but the next thing I knew, I had a bee hat and veil clamped over my head and I was standing in the middle of bees.

This is a very interesting industry. The Bellin Honey Farm is located at 518 South Seventh and has been operated commercially for 12 years by DeEtta and Charles Bellin and their sons, Dale, Harry (now in service) and Richard. There are about 1000 hives owned by the Bellins and placed at different homes, farms and ranches around O'Neill. They sell most of their product to Sioux

Bee company and some to Chicago and Omaha firms. However, they bottle about three tons a year for local trade.

O'Neill stores sell their product and it is packaged in a new and very clever clear plastic bottle, shaped like a honey bear with a hat dispenser through which the honey is squeezed.

This unusual business originated with Dale who purchased three hives and some equipment from one of Harry Ressel's boys. He operated the hives as a FFA project and when he began to make a little money on it, he turned it back into the business, buying more and more equipment.

Now their place, which covers eight acres, has two extracting buildings, with a new one just started, and thousands of dollars tied up in machinery and equipment. One extracting machine costs over \$700 and there are two of these and an expensive spin dryer. One established colony or bee hive costs about \$25.

Each year they must buy new bees to replace those lost through swarming or bad weather conditions. They recently purchased 200 packages of bees, each package weighing about three pounds and containing about 8,000 bees.

First of June sees the Bellins hard at work in the honey business. This continues until the latter part of September. During this time they watch the bees for swarming to see where the swarm lands. Most of the trees on the property have been sawed off to recover bees which swarmed and settled in uppermost branches of their trees. After sawing off the branch, the bees are gently returned to the hives.

Incidentally, the Bellins have been stung more times than they can count but they have no fear of the little insect—just ignore them, they say. However, their dogs aren't too fond of the stings. During my visit, the dogs would accompany us to the hives and then, all of a sudden, take off like a streak of lightning but without a sound. That was a sign they had been stung again. Dale would remove the stinger and back to the hives go the dogs.

When we approach the hives, guard bees immediately buzzed us continuously, flying around and striking, protecting their hive. Bees returning from their search for pollen and nectar would drop down to the front porch of the hive, so loaded with nectar they could scarcely stagger inside. Their legs were solid with bright yellow pollen.

Once inside the field bee opens her jaw and squeezes a drop of nectar out over her tongue and the house bee sips it. The field bee squeezes the nectar in and out of her honey sac and rolls it around her tongue about 20 minutes to take some of the moisture out and to mix it with gland chemicals so that it is ready to

ripen into honey.

Then the bee prepares to store the honey. The Bellins place several rectangular frames in the hive and each frame has a comb foundation from which the house bee build the full comb. This foundation saves time and honey as it takes lots of each for bees to make wax for their honey-comb.

Now the bee looks for an empty six-sided cell. She crawls in and after forcing the honey out of the sac, uses her tongue to paint the honey onto the top of the cell walls. When the cell is full, the honey is still quite thin and this is when the air-conditioning bees come into the picture. These bees stand at the hive entrance and continuously fan their wings to keep a breeze circulating. This cools the hive and dries the honey.

After the frames are full, the Bellins remove them and place them in the extracting machine. From there the honey goes through a sump pump, to the settling bulk tank and finally, to 60 pound cans or 55 gallon barrels which hold 720 pounds of honey.

The crop is repeatedly reaped until the first frost and during the winter months the bees stay in the hives, eating their stored honey and creating their own heat by moving back and forth. This is the time of year when the Bellins repair and build new equipment. Their buildings must pass federal and state inspection.

One brief word about the queen bee. Her only job is to lay eggs, as many as a million eggs al-

together. She is constantly attended by a few bees which feed her and keep her clean. She mates with one of the drones, the only function the drone accomplishes. When the bees realize their queen is going to die, they select an ordinary egg and feed it royal jelly which comes from the workers' head. Thus a new queen is born.

The Bellin family is active in state and national affairs of the Honey Producers association. Mrs. Bellin has been secretary and treasurer of the Association since 1955. Four years ago they prepared a float for the rodeo parade in O'Neill, using a jeep and surrounding it with chicken wire. Out of this wire they created a bee 20 feet long and six feet high, on which perched the Nebraska Honey Queen, Sharon Swanson of Amelia.

All the Bellins have hobbies—the making of replica guns, tanks and other interesting miniatures. Mrs. Bellin makes flowers and also uses colored bees wax to make candles. The Bellin Honey Farm is a fascinating place and a busy one. After sampling their honey I'm convinced you might get stung from the bees but not from their product.

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