

## Kaelyn Sumner – K's Bees

### Background:

I wanted to be a beekeeper for my FFA project. I eventually wanted to start selling honey and other value-added bee products. When I started, everyone was telling me that I would probably only get five pounds of honey that we would be able to eat, otherwise it all had to be left for the bees. This past summer, I was able to harvest 400 pounds of honey, and still leave 120 pounds in each hive for the winter. I was only able to make this dream a reality because I received a National FFA Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) grant and a State FFA SAE Grant worth a combined \$1500. I had a friend drag me out to her mother's bee hive and I fell in love with the hum that the calm bees make. I then wanted my own hives of bees to pollinate the fruit trees in my yard. It took over four months of pestering my middle school FFA advisor to help me get a mentor. I was really afraid of getting stung, but when I actually got stung I was hooked. What started as a bee sting turned into a life-long passion.

### Overview:

I own and manage five hives of honey bees. During the spring, before the nectar and pollen start being produced, I fed the bees to ensure hive health and strength. During late spring and summer, I monitor the hives weekly, to add more brood boxes and then honey supers. After the bees have produced adequate winter food, I harvest the extra in late July or August. Winter prep begins in August by reducing hive size and taking care of the hive pests. The honey produced by my bees is a raw unprocessed product that is only strained to remove bee parts and large pieces of wax. The honey, I bottled in to varying sizes of jars; anywhere from 1.7 ounce and 3 ounce glass gift jars to 8 ounce, 1 pound, all the way to 5 pound consumer jars. It is believed that consuming local honey, produced within 30 miles of your home, helps alleviate seasonal allergies and lessens cold severity. Raw honey is also known to be an effective natural cough suppressant. People are very interested when they find out that this is my FFA project and that I am a 16 year old beekeeper. The best-selling point is hooking them after they've had a taste test. I run a seasonal stand at the local weekly street market. Almost everyone I meet gets asked if they would like to buy honey. I have a business page that I use to get the word out on the social media front. I have done a couple giveaways and raffles with other small businesses in the area. I was also a vendor at a craft fair at the middle school holiday craft show. Through FFA, I ran a pre-holiday print promotion at the high school exclusive to the 150 staff members. I rely heavily on word of mouth advertising to promote my sales.

### Personal Qualities:

**Tenacity:** I kept insisting to my middle school agriculture advisor to help me find a person in the community that has bees to be my mentor. I persevered for four months. I was extremely interested in honey bees and was going to make this work. I convinced my parents that I was serious about bees. I met with my mentor for a year before getting my own bees to show that my interest was real. I jumped right into this project in the fall of 2017 after seeing a Craigslist advertisement. I invested \$1500 of my own money to purchase equipment from a retiring beekeeper. There was no turning back now. I applied for a National FFA grant: a 10-page

application. I ended up getting a \$1000 grant from the Society for the Preservation of Honey Bees. I also got a grant from the Wisconsin FFA Foundation for \$500. This money could not be used to repay what I had already spent; it could only be used for the budget items earmarked on the grant application. Overnight, I went from owning enough equipment for six hives to now eight hives of equipment, six hives of bees, and my bee suit.

#### The Future:

This year, I am hoping to expand my apiary from five hives to nine hives. I will also be adding comb honey production to my experience. This year, I'm going to be adding Facebook advertising to my social media presence. The increase in hives should double my honey production with about one hundred pounds of that being high quality comb honey. I will continue to provide product to established customers and through my stall at the local street markets. I already have discussions under way to work with a local specialty grocery store to have them carry my products on a retail level after selling to them in a wholesale arrangement. I will be offering my product line up as additional sales items on my FFA Chapter's Fruit & Nut sale fundraiser, where the FFA Chapter will make \$1 on every item sold, and I will continue to make my set price. I am also hoping to work with an exclusive restaurant that features local products and add my honey products to their ingredient list as a featured menu item.