

# Top Bar Hive Beekeeping in Kansas

Think about it.

Here are some points to consider:

- 1) TB Hive management style requires higher skills and confidence
- 2) Not enough long-time beekeepers with TBH experience to mentor or support
- 3) Geography is a factor for TBH winter survival
- 4) 'Natural' bee nest movement is not horizontal but vertical
- 5) Limited winter honey storage
- 6) Honey harvesting - comb destruction & replacement
- 7) Limited or restricted hive movement
- 8) Higher returns (ROI) with Langstroth hives (8 or 10-frame)

This beekeeping management style required for working with top-bar hives (TBH) demands a higher level of skill and confidence from new beekeepers. Quite simply, we do not have enough long-time beekeepers with TBH experience to successfully mentor or give support.

Consider that Langstroth 8- or 10- frame hive has been around for over 150 years, and is 'standard' equipment.

Other considerations are explained:

**Our geography can prove difficult for winter survival.** The elongated horizontal configuration of the Tanzanian and Kenyan styled hives are not appropriate for our severe winters. During the cold, it is 'natural' for the bees to move up (vertically)-- not horizontally over on the combs. This is how colonies are found in the trunks of trees or walls of structures.

Without active management (moving frames) during the cold season, horizontal TBH beekeepers are at greater risk of losing their colonies to the cold and to starvation.

Most years, we do not have sufficient enough warm days in January/February for the colony to graduate to combs full of stored honey when critically needed. It is simply too cold for the bee nest to move 'over'.

**The horizontal TBH's have too small winter food capacity.**

A TBH beekeeper will need to feed their bees each fall, and during winter, to give them a surviving chance in over-wintering as TB hives only allow for about 20-25 pounds of stored honey. This is simply not enough food stores.

The Langstroth hive design allows for enough honey stores and space for natural, organic beekeeping. Although, sometimes, we still have to feed our bees due to abnormal weather conditions such as heat and drought in the preceding season(s).

The Warré hive needs 3 boxes to sustain the colony through our winters here in NE Kansas. 4 would be even better for the bees to have enough to over-winter without having to be fed. Even this hive style is difficult to provide any possible necessary feeding.

**Honey processing in TBH beekeeping is not the modern way to harvest honey!** Anytime honey is harvested, the colony must build new comb in the next season. This takes additional resources (honey) in the spring.

The comb of the TBH cannot be centrifuged to extract honey and then be re-used. Combs have to be cut or torn out, crushed, and the contents strained by over-night draining.

Crushing honeycomb as a means of harvesting liquid honey pre-dates the invention of the honey extractor. The modern day honey extractor was invented in the 1860's.

**Top-bar hives cannot easily be moved.** The combs do not have the strength necessary to support them during any kind of travel! The combs are more susceptible to breakage and collapse on the road. The combs will collapse internally with any extensive travel.

Small in stature, or have a bad back, or unable to lift moderate to heavy hive bodies? Perhaps the 8-frame Langstroth hive would be a better consideration. The 8-frame hive is more of a 'garden-style' and is less bulky in size and weight than the 10-frame hive.

**For honey production the Langstroth hive is best.**

We believe our members should get a return on their investment (ROI). Too, new beekeepers deserve proven practicality!

Beekeepers want hives that can be easily manipulated, yet we also want to give our bees the best chance of growth, productivity, and year-to-year survival. We want all beekeepers to have success, and enjoyment, and sustainability!

In summary, the association wants to promote an 'active' style of beekeeping. We encourage 'active' management for honey production as well as for wax, pollen, propolis, pollination services and other uses of honey bee products – collectively called “Apitherapy”.

If you have been keeping TBH's for a while in our geographical area, AND have been successful, we'd love to consider you for a presentation at one of our functions. We'd like to hear from you!

<sup>1</sup>Curious? We have several books in our association library on this topic available for check-out by current members.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nekba.org>