THE EFFECTS OF THE DECEMBER 1962 FREEZE ON CITRUS HONEY PRODUCTION IN FLORIDA

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Many of the effects of the freeze in December, 1962, on the Florida citrus industry have been reported in detail, but nothing has been said about how the cold affected the beekeeping industry in the state. Florida’s average annual honey production is about 20,000,000 pounds, and approximately 2,000,000 pounds comes from the various varieties of citrus. The total honey crop for 1963 probably will be about the same as the 1962 crop; however, the amount of citrus honey produced was only about one-fourth as much as normal.

It has been estimated that 75 percent of the citrus groves in the state suffered partial defoliation and that 50 percent of them were injured enough to have some wood loss. In these damaged groves the amount of bloom and nectar secretion was affected to varying degrees. In some areas there was practically no bloom, while in others the bloom was fairly heavy. However, in many instances little or no nectar was produced even though the trees bloomed freely. Only in Brevard, Indian River, St. Lucie, Broward, and Highland Counties were the bloom and nectar secretion anywhere near normal. Even in these areas the production per colony was quite low since thousands of colonies had been moved there from other parts of the state. In the other sections of the citrus belt the beekeepers were fortunate if their colonies brought in enough nectar to maintain themselves.

Fig. 1 shows the production of citrus honey by colonies located near Clermont, Florida, where defoliation of the trees and extensive wood loss due to the freeze was quite prevalent. During the first three weeks of the 1963 citrus bloom the colonies made an average gain of 6 pounds, but at the end of the bloom they showed an average loss of 8 pounds. In the previous three years the average net gain was as follows: 1962—52 pounds, 1961—85 pounds, 1962—61 pounds. Since the amount of citrus honey produced by other beekeepers in the ridge section was about the same it is easy to understand why the 1963 citrus honey crop was so small.

Fortunately for Florida beekeepers, the other major nectar sources produced well. The ilex or gallberry nectar flow in most parts of the state was the heaviest and of the best quality in many years. The saw palmetto also secreted large quantities of nectar in most areas.

Although recovery of most of the damaged groves has been quite good, it is still too early to make any prediction concerning the outlook for the 1964 citrus honey crop. In the past, the honey crops have been rather poor for two years after the trees had been damaged by cold.

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Fig. 1. Citrus honey production by colonies located near Clermont, Florida, 1960-1963.