

Kenneth Ray Newton
Belfield, N.D.
Newton Honey Company
Products: Honey
Size of Operation: 1,400 hives
In Business Since: 1996
Farm Credit Partner: Farm Credit Services of Mandan
Working with Farm Credit Since: 2000



At just 1/300th of an ounce, a honeybee must be **America's smallest livestock animal, but it carries a heavy responsibility** – in addition to producing its own crops like honey and wax, honeybees are critical for the pollination of other crops like apples, blueberries, onions and pumpkins.

Each year, second-generation beekeeper Kenneth Ray Newton drives a semi-truck loaded with beehives from his **North Dakota farm to California, where they're put to work pollinating the annual almond crop.** Although a new variety of self-pollinating almonds has been introduced, today the industry relies on managed beehives and their keepers.

Kenneth always knew he wanted to be a beekeeper: he was around the bees as soon as he could walk, and started working for his father in 8th grade. He established his own operation 18 years ago and today, **in part with financing from Farm Credit Services of Mandan, he's built his operation to 1,400 hives.** The honey his bees produce goes to SueBee Honey, a cooperatively owned honey processing and marketing company.

Commercial beehives consist of multiple wooden frames that form the honeycomb. When it's time to remove the honey, the bees are first driven from the hive and then the frames are uncapped to allow the honey to run out and the comb to be removed. The comb is placed into a centrifuge, and with the addition of steam heat, the honey is spun out of the comb. How much honey is produced varies **depending on the weather.** “This year, we had a really good year. There was a lot of moisture, and the flowers seemed to produce later,” says Kenneth. “Usually, though, about half our income comes from the bees' products, the other half from the almond pollination fees.”

Although bees naturally die off, maintaining the health of his charges is top priority for Kenneth. He checks his hives monthly throughout the production season and cleans them thoroughly each spring, inspecting both the overall health of the bees and making sure each hive has a queen bee, without which **the worker bees will die or leave.** If a hive has lost its queen, it will sometimes “requeen” itself, or Kenneth will introduce a new queen he purchases from a special breeder.



Despite the care he takes, Kenneth has twice faced Colony Collapse Disorder, a growing problem around the world. Believed to be the result of mite infestation, the disorder results in wide-scale die-off. Kenneth has been hit twice –he lost 90% of his bees in 2007, and 75% in 2012. “There’s no way to get rid of mites completely, but we try to keep it under control,” says Kenneth. He follows a regular treatment program that kills any mites in the hive without harming the bees.

Kenneth enjoys what he does, even through its challenges and the hard, physical demands of the work. “It’s quite rewarding, especially when you have hives of our own,” he says.