



Beekeeper Interview

Fabian

Ybbs / Austria

Programme: Erasmus+ Bees and More

Participants:

- Student – Researcher
- Fabian (Beekeeper)

Interview Transcript

Interviewer:

Okay, great. Fabian, thank you very much for taking the time to give us this interview. Could you start by telling us a little about yourself?

Fabian:

Yes, of course. My name is Fabian Pöcksteiner. I have been a beekeeper for about 20 years and I currently manage around 20 bee colonies. I also run a shop, where I sell beekeeping equipment and supplies.

Interviewer:

Thank you. In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges for beekeepers today?

Fabian:

First of all, getting started with beekeeping is already a big challenge. Both the theoretical knowledge and the practical work require a lot of experience and time. Especially at the beginning, it is important to plan enough time for the bees and for working on the hives, particularly from April to August.

Interviewer:

Okay. What kinds of honey and bee products do you produce yourself?

Fabian:

Mainly spring blossom honey and general blossom honey. In our region, the Mostviertel, we also produce mixed honey made from blossom and forest honey. At the end of the year we often have the classic forest honey as well.

Interviewer:

Do you separate these honey types?



Fabian:

Yes, depending on the year, the flowering period, and the nectar flow, we separate them.

Interviewer:

Do you also produce other bee products besides honey?

Fabian:

Yes, there are many different bee products. For example, creamed honey, which I produce myself, and also propolis drops.

Interviewer:

In your opinion, what effects does climate change have on the environment and specifically on bees?

Fabian:

Climate change affects the availability of nectar sources. The period during which bees can collect nectar is becoming shorter in some cases. At the same time, new pests are appearing. For example, when it comes to controlling the Varroa mite, beekeepers now have to adapt their methods because weather conditions are changing.

Interviewer:

So you mean that the nectar flow period is getting shorter?

Fabian:

Yes, exactly.

Interviewer:

Why is that? Because of drought?

Fabian:

Partly because of drought, but also because of longer rainy periods, for example in autumn.

Interviewer:

You might assume that the period would become longer because of warming temperatures.

Fabian:

Yes, that would seem logical, but in practice it does not always work that way.

Interviewer:

There is also a new pest, the Asian hornet.

Fabian:

Yes, exactly. That is a new pest that will probably affect Austria as well.

Interviewer:

What advice would you give someone who wants to start beekeeping?

Fabian:



First of all, learn the theory. Read books and build up your knowledge. Once you have enough theoretical knowledge, I would recommend starting with two bee colonies. After that, practical experience becomes very important. The first year is always very challenging, so patience and a lot of reading are essential.

Interviewer:

What changes have you noticed during your time as a beekeeper regarding the environment and bee health?

Fabian:

As we mentioned before, pests are becoming more common and more difficult to control. Another issue is that the brood-free period in winter is sometimes shorter. When summers are longer and warmer, the bees remain in the brood phase longer. That benefits the Varroa mite, which is harmful to the bees.

Interviewer:

Wild bees, bumblebees, and honeybees — are they competitors, or can they coexist?

Fabian:

In general, bees and bumblebees coexist very well and even complement each other. Some people claim that they compete for food, but for that to be a serious problem there would have to be an extremely large number of bee colonies.

Interviewer:

What do you think is currently the biggest threat to bees?

Fabian:

Climate change and the increasing number of pests. These factors represent a major threat to bees.

Interviewer:

What can homeowners or hobby gardeners do to support pollinators?

Fabian:

The most important thing is to create a good food supply in the garden. Plant bee-friendly flowers and plants, mow the lawn less frequently, and provide water sources for insects and bees.

Interviewer:

Is there increasing interest in bee products today, apart from honey?

Fabian:

Yes, the demand for bee products is growing. In Austria, only about 50% of the honey consumed is actually produced within the country, which is a problem. Demand for honey, propolis drops, and pollen is quite high. The market exists, and the demand is positive because these products are considered very healthy.



Interviewer:

When demand increases, there is also a higher risk of poor-quality products entering the market. How can consumers distinguish real beekeeper honey from lower-quality honey?

Fabian:

The best way is to buy honey regionally and directly from a beekeeper. That supports local beekeeping and pollination. If you buy directly from a beekeeper — and maybe even know them personally — you can be about 90% sure that the honey is genuine.

Interviewer:

How do you see the future of beekeeping in Austria?

Fabian:

Overall, it looks good. Demand is there, and the number of courses and training opportunities is increasing. These are well received.

Interviewer:

Is there also young talent entering the field?

Fabian:

Yes, there are always new people becoming interested in beekeeping. Demand goes up and down, but having new beekeepers is definitely important.

Interviewer:

Beekeeping used to be considered a hobby mainly for older men. Has that changed?

Fabian:

Yes, it has improved in recent years, but there is still room for improvement.

Interviewer:

Based on your customers, how large are their operations? How many hives do they usually have?

Fabian:

The average in Austria, if I remember correctly, is around six to eight colonies. That is the typical hobby beekeeper, usually keeping hives in their own garden.

Interviewer:

So mainly for pollination and a bit of honey production?

Fabian:

Exactly.

Interviewer:

Which bee products do you personally use?

Fabian:

Pretty much all of them: creamed honey, regular honey, blossom honey, forest honey, and propolis drops. We also produce beeswax sheets, or foundation, for beekeepers, as well as beeswax candles and pollen.



Interviewer:

Do you have any experience with beekeepers from other countries?

Fabian:

Not a lot, but I have had some contact. It was generally positive.

Interviewer:

Alright. Thank you very much for your answers, and I wish you continued success with your business.

Fabian:

Thank you.