

Okaw Valley H.S. manages Bee Hives

New program teaches students about pollinators

- Stan Polanski Daily Union
- Jul 13, 2017



JT Bland holds up one of the bee colonies Okaw Valley has overseen this summer.

Okaw Valley High School students have been managing three bee hives this summer as part of a new program that will teach students about the pollinators.

"It's a learning experience, a science experiment, and something fun," said Wes Wise, an Okaw Valley agriculture instructor. "It's an opportunity that no other school in the area has. It's just a neat thing."

Ethan Macklin, the Okaw Valley FFA president, and JT Bland, a recent graduate, have kept tabs on the hives, along with the help of Wise and Tom Brachbill, a retired science teacher.

Wise said that when people think of bees they think about their populations declining. But that's really only the case for non-native species, he said.

On the Lithia Springs property, where Okaw Valley manages 75 acres of land, the school's three new hives have thrived. After two or three feedings of sugar water, the bees have adapted perfectly and become self-sufficient, the bee keepers said.

"Our hives are growing and producing honey at a rapid rate," Wise said.

Whether or not bees are actually struggling, Macklin said the hives make the school's agriculture program more attractive.

"I think it's a good way to reach the community," he said. "People are interested when you say you're taking care of bees."

In addition to the more exposure, Wise said science classes can learn about the hives and pollinators and business classes can learn about honey sales. Nearby wildflowers and crops are also expected to benefit.

"We're really big on stewardship," he said. "And this helps us hit the full gamut."

Wise said he'd like to see more hives.

"Our goal, as we grow the program, is to have 10, 12, 15 hives over the Lake Shelbyville area," he said.

The 75 acres, which is run by the school district in partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, is a relatively recent development. With the addition of the bee colonies and other forthcoming plans, the district's agriculture program is expected to offer much more in the coming years.

"I'd be really excited if I was a young student in the district," Macklin said, a senior.