



Manitoba Cooperative Honey Producers Limited

As part of Saskatchewan Co-operative Association's ongoing series of cooperative profiles, we interviewed Karen Miles. Karen began at the Manitoba Cooperative Honey Producers Limited as a receptionist, later moving into the Member Accounting position, where she stayed for many years. She has been Manager of the Manitoba Cooperative for the past 3 years. She is in charge of Member Relations, keeping her in contact with members regularly, providing info, answering questions and addressing any issues or concerns. She oversees the two Beekeeping Supply stores in Winnipeg, MB and Tisdale, SK, and is in charge of administration for the Manitoba Cooperative.

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What is the Manitoba Honey Cooperative? Where is your cooperative located?

The Manitoba Cooperative Honey Producers Limited provides beekeepers with storage, manufacturing, processing and marketing facilities and services for their honey products on a cooperative basis. In addition to providing members with a market for their products, the cooperative, through its large-scale purchasing power, provides supplies of beekeeping equipment to beekeepers. The Manitoba Cooperative is located in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

How or why did the Saskatchewan and Manitoba Bee Cooperatives merge into one? What about the Alberta Honey Co-operative?

The Cooperative was organized by a committee of the Manitoba Beekeepers' Association to relieve the distressed marketing situation in the beekeeping industry of the 1930s. The Cooperative was incorporated in 1939 under the Manitoba Companies Act with the head office located in Winnipeg. In 1939 the Cooperative proceeded to market, on an orderly basis, a processed high quality product under a registered brand name. At about the same time, and with similar limited resources, the Saskatchewan Honey Producers Co-operative was formed and began packing and marketing honey for Saskatchewan beekeepers. This operation was set up at Tisdale, Saskatchewan. In 1970 a joint decision by the members of both the Saskatchewan and Manitoba cooperatives led to an amalgamation of the membership of the two organizations, under the name of Manitoba Cooperative Honey Producers Limited. In 1976, for marketing and economic reasons, the processing and packing operations were discontinued at Tisdale.

Bee Maid Honey Limited is owned jointly and equally by Manitoba Cooperative Honey Producers Limited and Alberta Honey Producers Co-operative Limited. Bee Maid Honey is owned by the Member beekeepers in western Canada. The Directors of the two cooperatives are also the Directors of Bee Maid Honey. Bee Maid receives the revenue from all processed honey sales and is responsible for

paying the costs of honey containers, processing, freight, commissions, advertising and all other related expenses. The net proceeds are then returned to the cooperatives on a shared basis.

How does the Manitoba Honey Cooperative presently contribute to or address community needs?

Bee Maid Honey Limited created a Fiftieth Anniversary Scholarship in 2004 to commemorate the formation of Bee Maid Honey Limited in 1954. The Scholarship recognizes and encourages children and grandchildren of our members and staff as they enter post-secondary study. The Scholarships are designed to stimulate the pursuit of excellence by rewarding outstanding achievement.

Bee Maid Honey Limited also provides funding in any area of apicultural or pollination research each year. Preference is given to the area of honey, and the production of pure quality honey in the Canadian beekeeping industry.

How many members does your cooperative have? Where in Western Canada do they come from? How do they benefit from belonging to a co-op?

The Manitoba Cooperative currently has just over 160 members who reside in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The Manitoba Cooperative provides its members the ability to process their honey, to prevent loss through fermentation, to pack honey of a uniform high quality and to market honey in an orderly manner. Prior to the Cooperatives' formation, beekeepers were forced to pack their own honey and to market in competition with one another. The entire year's crop was dumped on the market each fall. The Cooperative provides the member with drums and a freight allowance is also paid.

What have been the greatest successes of the cooperative? How were they achieved? What about some challenges?

I believe that longevity is one of our successes. The fact that our cooperative has not only survived for over 70 years, but that we have continued to grow and to remain strong as well is something of which to be truly proud. We are continually receiving requests for membership in

our cooperative, which is a promising sign of continued growth in the future. I believe this has been achieved by providing our members with a market for their honey and other beekeeping products at a fair and reasonable price on an orderly marketing basis.

One of the challenges being faced, not only here but all over the world, is the decline in the bee population. Another challenge we face is trying to stay competitive. We provide a truly exceptional product that is 100% Canadian. This can be a challenge at times when you are trying to compete with cheaper imports.

What makes your cooperative unique in the honey production industry?

I believe our cooperative is unique due to the fact that control is in the hands of the members. Regardless of the size of each member's operation, the principle of one member-one vote applies. The fact that we use an orderly marketing basis when selling our honey is also key.

What do you envision for your co-op in the next five years?

Within the next five years, we look to have all of our members registered with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, to strive continually to grow the sales in our Beekeeping Supply stores in

Winnipeg, Manitoba and Tisdale, Saskatchewan as well as growing and expanding our honey markets.

How can people find out more about your cooperative?

To find out more information about the Manitoba Cooperative and Bee Maid Honey, people can visit our website at www.beemaid.com or they can contact me directly at the Winnipeg office.

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Manitoba head-office