

## Business is buzzing

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Beekeeper Terry Ross, owner of Ross Berry Farm and Apiaries in Union Hill, shows a demonstration hive of honeybees.

**Photo by Amber M. Eberly**

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The buzz over honeybees in Cherokee County has grown over the last year, with more people making and buying local honey.

Honeybees are the Georgia Farm Bureau's commodity of the year and the focus of the local and statewide Agriculture Week celebration beginning Sunday.

Ryan Sarks, president of the Cherokee Beekeeper's Club, said the club's annual beekeeping class last month attracted about 70 people, twice the usual amount.

Sarks said beekeeping is gaining popularity, as food prices rise because keeping bees to pollinate gardens can improve production.

"You get a whole lot more produce and your fruits and vegetables will be bigger," he said. "You save money in the long run."

Sarks said people also are finding greater use of honey as a replacement for sugar or artificial sweeteners for tea and coffee.

About \$21,000 in honey was sold in the county last year, according to Paul Pugliese, a county extension agent with the University of Georgia's College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. In 2007, the value of honey sold in the county was \$14,000.

Pugliese said Cherokee primarily is a hobbyist beekeeping county, noting he knows of only two local commercial operations: Ross Berry Farm and Apiaries in Union Hill and Weeks Works in Ball Ground. He said the industry is more active in the southern part of the state.

Terry Ross, who operates Ross Berry Farm and Apiaries ([www.rossberryfarm.com](http://www.rossberryfarm.com)), said honey's popularity is rising as people move toward a more natural diet.

"Everybody wants to get back to being more natural," he said. "All this processed food we are eating is killing us. Honey is about as natural as you can get."

Ross has 80 beehives that are stationed in Cherokee and Pickens counties.

"You'd be surprised how many people will let you keep bee hives on their property," he said.

He has had hives spread out as far as Cobb, Fulton, Bartow and Dawson counties, but is trying to move them closer to home.

Ross and his wife, Jeannie, sell honey, honeybees, beekeeper supplies, beeswax candles and birdhouses.

He started working with bees about 15 years ago. It was an activity he had wanted to get into for a long time, but had turned into a "dream I had given up on."

His desire was rekindled after seeing a bee club meeting advertised in the newspaper.

Ross attended the meeting, and "next thing I knew, I had two colonies of bees."

Now he plans on keeping bees "until I die."