

Extension offers beekeeping education for high-altitude, short-season success

AT A GLANCE

Short season beekeeping presents challenges that are underrepresented in foundational beekeeping education. Introductory classes and courses were implemented to help new beekeepers find success.

The Situation

Interest in hobby beekeeping has grown exponentially in the past decade with increasing societal interest in helping pollinator species and slogans like “Save-the-Bees.” Honeybees play vital roles in our food system, pollinating over 1/3 of crops grown in the U.S., and over 3/4 of the world’s plants require pollination for survival.

Many new beekeepers find information online, yet the accuracy and quality of information can vary. Even with reputable educational sources, there is little presented that covers the unique challenges that beekeepers face in high-altitude, short season climates. As a result, many new beekeepers quit after a couple of years largely due to unrealistic expectations, inadequate education and mentorship, high startup costs and hive mortality problems.

Our Response

To address this unmet need, University of Idaho Extension in Teton County began beekeeping programming starting with a 4-H beekeeping and gardening club in 2017 with funding from the Community Foundation of Teton Valley’s Youth Philanthropy Grant Program.



Extension educator and 4-H beekeeping leader, Jennifer Werlin, leads youth in a hive inspection.

Shortly thereafter, UI Extension helped form the Teton Valley Beekeeping Association, which offers networking, education and mentorship to beekeepers in the Teton counties of Idaho and Wyoming. Spring and fall meetings help members prepare for seasonal management, and a small membership fee grants access to shared equipment and an electric honey extractor.

In 2019, UI Extension partnered with an experienced local beekeeper to offer a foundational course for beginner and intermediate beekeepers. Thirty-seven people enthusiastically participated, with 29 completing the evaluation, marking the start of Extension’s formal beekeeping education efforts in the Tetons.

In 2023, educator Jennifer Werlin partnered with Mountain Roots Education to develop a two-part

beekeeping course tailored to Idaho's short growing season, drawing 31 participants.

Building on that success, a more comprehensive introductory course was taught to 23 participants in December 2025. Due to regional demand, it was delivered online via Zoom in two, two-hour evening sessions, with recordings available for six months. Geographic reach included Teton Valley locals as well as statewide Idaho participants joining via Zoom.

In June 2026, an optional open apiary session let participants and association members practice hive inspections. Later that month, a workshop at Teton Full Circle Farm in Victor, Idaho — held with Wyoming Wildlife Advocates and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service — taught attendees how to build apiary fencing to protect hives from bears and other predators.

Program Outcomes

The 2025-2026 course was refined from previous classes to address participant feedback and improve accessibility for participants who could not attend classes in person. Participants were overwhelmingly beginners, as most had zero prior beekeeping experience.

A mixed-methods evaluation was used to assess participant learning outcomes and program effectiveness. Pre-course polling captured participant demographics, geographic location and baseline beekeeping knowledge. Eighteen participants completed a post-course Qualtrics evaluation that measured gains in knowledge, awareness and perceived ability to keep backyard bees.

The curriculum began with the foundations of beekeeping, including bee biology, hive anatomy, equipment and what makes high-altitude and short season beekeeping different. For the second class, seasonal management, mite and pest treatment, overwintering techniques and swarm management were covered.

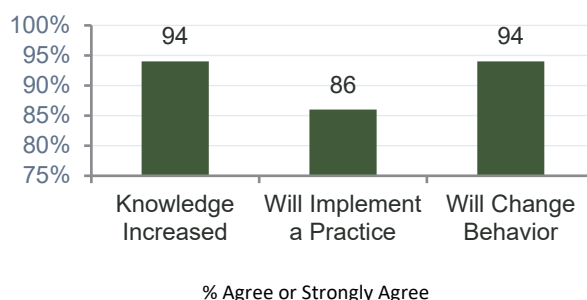
Participant feedback was very positive with some participants noting they liked the class format of two evening classes, while some participants noted that the

course could be divided into shorter and more frequent sessions for future iterations.

During the open apiary session, four participants took part in a hive inspection to observe frames, brood patterns and to check overall hive health. The bee fence workshop that was held a few weeks later walked participants through how to construct their own electric beekeeping fence, with participants also eligible to receive their own electric fence from Wyoming Wildlife Advocates.

Evaluation results indicated that the course was effective in increasing participants' knowledge of beekeeping and that participants would change their behavior based on the course and would strongly implement a tool, strategy or practice presented in the course. A participant commented, "I just really enjoyed learning about beekeeping! I really didn't know anything, and now I know a lot more."

Table 1. 2025-2026 Post-Course Evaluation (N=18)



The Future

This course provides a replicable model for beekeeping education in short-season climates. Its flexible online format makes the program easy to adapt and expand. Recorded sessions also give participants the flexibility to revisit key lessons throughout the season. When paired with local beekeeping associations and open apiary sessions, new opportunities for hands-on learning, mentorship and community support are created. This approach can help more beginning beekeepers build the knowledge and confidence they need to succeed — no matter how short the season.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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