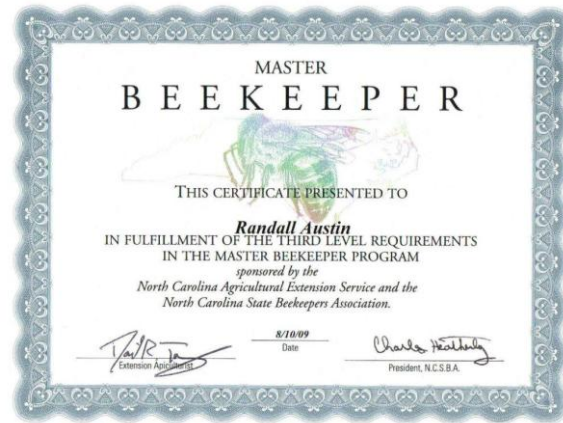


I had a great time conducting the field day for Bailey's Bee Supply's introductory beekeeping class last month. As part of the activities, we administered the NC Master Beekeeper Program's "Certified Beekeeper" written test to anyone who was a paid-up member of the NC Beekeepers Association. Someone asked what they get if they pass both the written and hands-on practical tests at the Certified level. The short answer is, "The admiration of your friends and a nice certificate suitable for framing." The long answer is... longer.

But first... what is the North Carolina Master Beekeeper Program? You may have heard of Master Gardeners: well-informed folks who can tell you what to put on your hydrangeas to make them change colors. They take classes, read a lot, plant a lot of flowers and then go to garden clubs and elementary schools to share their knowledge with other people. Master Beekeepers are very similar, for similar reasons. They have a passion for honey bees, a thirst for knowledge and a compelling desire to share their passion with others.

According to the MBP description on the NC State Beekeepers Association website, the purpose of the program is to "provide an infrastructure whereby beekeepers can improve their beekeeping skills and knowledge on a continuous basis within a system that objectively and formally acknowledges those accomplishments. It also serves as a means of providing valuable information to beekeepers and the public through various outreach services." It was started in 1982 by the State Apiculturist at that time, NCSU's Dr. John Ambrose. Dr. Ambrose based the concept on a similar program run by his alma mater, Cornell University. Dr. David Tarpy took over the administration of the program when he was named State Apiculturist. In 2011, state budget cuts required that the administration shift from NCSU to the NC State Beekeepers Association. We are fortunate that Dr. Ambrose has recently stepped in to once again oversee the program in this new environment.



There are four steps in the MBP. To progress, the candidate must demonstrate knowledge of honey bees in three areas: 1) honey bee biology, 2) honey bee management and 3) honey bee industry. Each step has its own requirements:

### **Certified Beekeeper**

Entry level for the program

1. Candidates must pass a written test. Questions deal with common honey bee topics such as, "why might you need to requeen a hive?" and "what country is the largest supplier of honey on the world market?"
2. Candidates must pass a practical test involving manipulation of a hive of bees. Can you tell the difference between the different castes of bees? Can you judge whether a hive is well-provisioned for winter? Can you make valid recommendations for dealing with issues found during a hive inspection?

### **Journeyman Beekeeper**

A beekeeper who has demonstrated good beekeeping skills and knowledge

1. Candidates must pass a written test.
2. Candidates must pass a practical test. This is a one-on-one Q&A with an interviewer. You must identify and explain various tools, objects, and pictures relating to honey bee biology and beekeeping.

3. Candidates must have two years of beekeeping experience.
4. Candidates must have accumulated five units of public service credit.

### Master Beekeeper

A beekeeper who has demonstrated extensive expertise in beekeeping and a number of specialized areas in beekeeping. There are roughly 75 NC Master Beekeepers.

1. Candidates must pass a written test
2. Candidates must pass a practical test. This is a “virtual” test – you must provide documentation that you have achieved mastery/excellence in selected beekeeping specialties.
3. Candidates must have 3 years of beekeeping experience.
4. Candidates must have accumulated 10 units of public service credits.

### Master Craftsman Beekeeper

The highest level of the program composed of Master Beekeepers who have demonstrated excellence in teaching, public and media interactions, a substantial commitment to beekeepers and beekeeping, and who have passed an oral examination. The Master Craftsman designation is awarded for five-year active appointments. Then the individual is moved into an emeritus status unless he/she is recertified by earning an additional 15 units of public service credit and demonstrating that he/she has kept current on matters affecting bees and beekeeping. There are about a dozen NC Master Craftsman Beekeepers.

1. Candidates must pass an oral examination, comparable to the oral exam for a student in a Master of Science program at a university.
2. Candidates must have two years as a Master Beekeeper.
3. Candidates must present a program at a state bee meeting.
4. Candidates must demonstrate communication skills.
5. Candidates must pass a practical test, as for the Master level, documenting

mastery/excellence in a minimum of seven required beekeeping specialty areas.

6. Candidates must participate in a NCSU sponsored research project.
7. Candidates must earn 15 units of public service credits

The required service credits aren't just about giving presentations to school children, although those do count! Examples of service credits I submitted for consideration include:

1. A friend asked me to remove a colony of bees from the crawl space of a church. When I went to check them out, I found a very active colony of yellow jackets. I advised my friend to either ignore them until winter, when the problem would take care of itself, or exterminate them if they were a safety risk to the congregation. This counted as a teaching and service interaction with the public, even though the “bees” turned out to not be bees at all.
2. The Advanced Latin class at Orange High School was translating Virgil's “Aeneid”, which has a section about bee society and life in the hive. The students were having trouble understanding the poetic bits about the drones. So their teacher brought the class on a field trip to my bee yard, where I opened a hive and showed them the colony dynamics that Virgil was describing.
3. I always volunteer to do at least one shift at the NC State Fair bee exhibit in October. Don't be intimidated thinking that you must be an expert to work at the bee booth. If you know the difference between a queen, a worker and a drone, then you know more than 99% of the general public!

The MBP is designed to get people in, not keep people out. If you are serious about advancing, the program administrators will be serious about helping you. The goal isn't to be a “know-it-all”; it's to be a “serve-‘em-all”. We want to prepare and encourage people so they will share their knowledge and experience with others, including being a “bee ambassador” to

the general public. This is an important distinction between the NC program and several of the others around the country (e.g. Eastern Apicultural Society MBP). Knowledge is very important as a gauge of credibility, but knowledge alone won't get you anywhere in the NC MBP. Service credits are the focus of the program, combined with a demonstrated seriousness about advancing your skill set. If you are interested in participating, check out the information available on the [NCSBA website](#). Another great resource on the web is [South Carolina's MBP program description](#), which provides some details that North Carolina's doesn't. The South Carolina program was copied from North Carolina, so the overall requirements are the same. Find Master Beekeepers in your [local county association](#) and ask them for advice. And attend the [Annual Summer Meeting](#) of the NCSBA July 10-12 in Wilkesboro; written and practical testing at every level will be available there. So to answer our original question, what do you get as you advance through the MBP steps other than a nice certificate? Hopefully you'll get the knowledge and experience you need to intelligently and effectively share your passion with others. You'll have official verification that you are a credible ambassador for beekeeping issues, not just another wild-eyed self-appointed nut case. And you'll have the satisfaction of being a member of the select few who are recognized for their dedication to serving fellow beekeepers and the public. How's that?

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A beekeeper (Aristotle) shares his wisdom, earning a service credit.