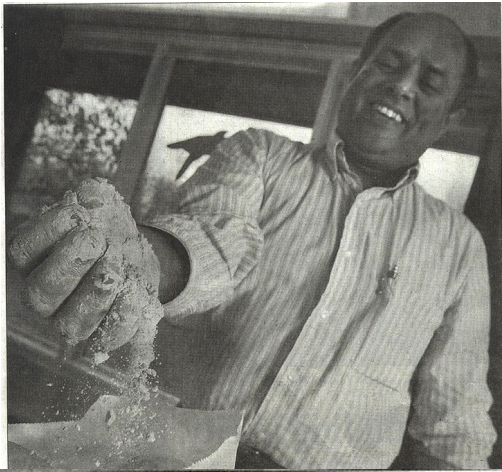




GUELPH MERCURY



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TYLER BROWNBRIDGE, GUELPH MERCURY

Abdolreza Saffari grabs a handful of his product Feed Bee inside the University of Guelph's bee lab yesterday. Saffari is hoping his product could lead to higher honey production for beekeepers.

U of G prof keeps bees a buzzing hive of activity

BY BRIAN WHITWHAM
MERCURY STAFF

GUELPH

Abdolreza Saffari has no idea how many bee stings he's had over the last eight years.

"God only knows," the University of Guelph master's student said yesterday with a shrug. "You get used to it."

But he said he's ready to prove that it's all been worth it.

With the help of faculty members, Saffari said, he has invented the first scientifically formulated and tested pollen substitute, which will keep bee colonies healthy and strong.

Eight years ago, he was working on a master's degree in animal nutrition at the University of Agricultural Sciences in India. He became interested in bees and the challenges that beekeepers around the world face when trying to keep their colonies strong while pollen isn't available.

Honey bees provide the protein harnessed from pollen to the queen bee and young bees in their nests. As the queen gets more protein, she lays more eggs and the colony becomes larger. Larger colonies produce more

honey and are better pollinators of crops.

Saffari said he realized there's little scientific data on pollen substitute diets for bees. He said many pollen substitutes are a traditional recipe of soy flour, sugar and some type of yeast.

"Bee nutrition is 50 years behind animal nutrition," he said. "It's very much a new science."

After completing his master's degree, he continued his research at a university in Iran before coming to Canada four years ago. In January 2003, he approached Peter Kevan, a professor of environmental biology at the University of Guelph, with his idea.

Over the next year, Kevan said, they continued to develop their recipe "with a more in-depth approach than has ever been applied to any bee diet."

They tested the formula in a lab and provided it to nine beekeepers in the region. Kevan said they discovered that their mixture, which is nutritionally geared to the bees' bodies, is more tasty to the bees than other products on the market.

"We know it's better than anything else on the market," Kevan said. "In some respects, it works better than

natural pollen, which was a surprise to us as you might imagine."

Les Simonffy, a beekeeper from Hamilton, said he used the formula on his bees in the spring and was very impressed with the results.

"It wasn't a good year, weatherwise. We had a lot of rain. But I had more honey than I've ever had per hive," he said. "I had a very good crop of honey and all of my hives were very strong."

"I don't think that's a coincidence." The test results were published in the March 2004 issue of *American Bee Journal*.

Since then, Saffari said samples of the pollen substitute have been sent to California, Brazil and Iran.

He said there's a Toronto-area business ready to manufacture the product, and soon his bee feed will be on the global market, competitively priced with other pollen substitutes, which are about one-tenth the cost of real pollen.

"All I'm trying to do is present something good for Canadian beekeepers and the world," Saffari said.

But as a honey lover, he said there is a selfish element to the work.

"All we need is more honey. So we're helping (bees) so that they help us."