

Locally Grown Nature's Sweetness

Hawley honey has been satisfying area *sweet tooths* for over 75 years.

In 1936, Cyrus Hawley decided that satisfying people's "sweet tooth" could be profitable. So he tapped bee hives by sawing a wedge out of the side of trees and cutting out the honey. He delivered that natural, golden honey to regular customers around Iola, Kansas. In the late 1940s, his son Eldon expanded the business to include 5,000 bee colonies with 25 employees and named it Sweetheart Honey. He sold Sweetheart Honey at Associated Grocers, IGA warehouses and grocery store warehouses across the midwest. His business would have continued to grow if it hadn't started to rain. During that 1951 season, it rained for 30 days straight. Eldon lost all but 350 colonies. In the next couple of years, he managed to build his business back up to 700 colonies. But in the summer of 1953, the heat came. Temperatures soared to 119°F and caused a meltdown of the hives. With the loss of more than half of his hives, Eldon decided it was time to retire.

Fortunately, Eldon's son Raymond wanted to be in the bee business. Raymond recalls that as early as the age of four, he helped his dad care for the hives. When he started school at five, his first concern was that he wouldn't be able to help his dad take care of the bees. In 1962 he bought out his dad and today operates the business with his wife, Madeline "Mickey," his daughter and son-in-law, Robert and Benita, and their three children, and his grandson Chris. They have grown their business to 1800 colonies located in eastern Kansas.

"We do all the work ourselves" Raymond explained, "from building the bee houses, working the hives, and harvesting the honey to processing, bottling and packaging the honey." They operate from a 100-year old, five story flour mill in Iola, Kansas. Raymond said they could produce up to 18 barrels of honey per day. "We do all the work by hand," Raymond explained.

During August, the honey is harvested then transported to their plant. There, they cut the combs from the frames and these honey-laden frames are placed into a whirling spinner that removes all of the honey. The honey is gathered in stainless steel tanks and left to set until the air from the spinning process is dispersed. It is then dispensed into bottles and labeled.

The honey from Hawley Honey Farms is never heated above 120°F. Honey heated at 160°F is considered pasteurized, which destroys the nutrient or enzyme value of the honey. Hawley honey is also never filtered; it is strained to remove impurities. This careful process leaves the honey in its most natural state.

"We process our honey just like the company did in the beginning," Raymond said. "and you can tell we care when you taste our honey. It's pure and smooth, not slick. And there's no bitterness or aftertaste." Raymond smiled, "It has the same health benefits and tastes like it did when Cyrus Hawley cut it right from the tree."

Photos

Gathering honey ----Cutting the comb-----Spinning the honey-----Filling the Bears
Family Photo from left to right: Robert, Raymond, Chris, Brittany and Benita