

2-26-2007

## Interview with Carlton Simpson

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### Recommended Citation

Lewis, Elizabeth, "Interview with Carlton Simpson" (2007). *Interviews*. 21.  
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Accession number: FFT-MS-TR-LEWIS-022607  
Researcher's name: Elizabeth Lewis  
Event: Interview with Carlton Simpson  
Place: 15642 Tiger Valley Rd. Danville, OH 43014  
Co-Worker: None

L: This is Liz Lewis interviewing Carlton Simpson and it is February 26<sup>th</sup>. So, can you start out by just telling us when you started farming.

C: Well, I grew up a farmer as a child. You know, that's all I know. Basically we had dairy, hogs, and sheep when I was a child. And then after we got married I was still farming. After November 12<sup>th</sup> of 1980, I suffered from a spinal chord injury. And so, then... let's see, it was the spring of 1982 that we bought our first three beehives and then went from there. And there was a need for someone to supply equipment here in Knox County after Arnold Murrey passed away, cause he had some in his garage. So, we had some equipment around for our Bee Club.

L: What kind of equipment?

C: Bee keeping equipment. You know like frames, foundation, honey bearers and other containers to pack honey in. And so, ah, we also went into assembling and painting some equipment back in those days, because some people just didn't have time or whatever. And we were just beginning. So, anyway, ah, people liked that so the work got out further and further. It got out to surrounding counties. We never intended to supply anything except for some local bee-keepers in our own bee-keeping club here in Knox County. And then the word spread all across Ohio and surrounding states and now it's all across the nation.

L: So you sell to all different people?

C: Yeah. And we even sent one pallet of equipment to Alaska last year. A whole pallet of all kinds of supplies that a number of bee-keepers needed up there. They put an order together and had us sent a whole pallet.

L: For example, if I wanted to start up a honey operation, what would I need?

C: Um, you would need... when Bev gets a moment she can show you... But, we like to start people out with a screen bottom so as the bees groom mites off one-another, they can fall through. A mesh screen. And then there's a pan to pull out to let the bees bullet the hive to the ground. And then you can clean the pan off say every 30 days into the winter or anytime the pan is empty. You clean the debris off of it and then um treat the pan with some Canola oil or Crisco or anything sticky and oily. Because mites breathe through their skin, so we want them to parish. Then you would need... people who have good backs, we recommend that they have two-deep hives bodies that are pictured here. (Points to diagram of life stages) And then there's ten frames each. There's that screen bottom. We make our screen bottoms out of Red Cyprus. Um, after a while maybe Bev

can get you a picture of the different mites. The tracheal mite, for somebody that has 20-20 vision, it's got to be magnified 25 times just to see it. But it really needs to be magnified more like 45-50 times power for most people to see it under magnification. The tracheal mite lives in the bees trachea. So it sucks blood out of the trachea, from the inside of the bee. The vera mite is an external parasite and it sucks blood out of the bee externally. And it weakens their immune system. Once you get them losing too much blood, then they get weak. Just like anything else, they become anemic. Then, the viruses will become active. There's two viruses that will kill a bee-hive. One's the cashmere bee virus, the other is the bee paralysis virus. Ah, once they become active the whole hive is dead within 72 hours. So that's the importance that we emphasize on a screen bottom. People have strong backs, two deeps. People that don't, we recommend three mediums for the bees. Two of the mediums through the summer, with the queen excluder between the second and third one, so that you can take the queen excluder out in the fall and let 'em have three to go into the winter.

L: They produce only during the summer?

C: Right, yeah, there's got to be lots of blossoms and pollen for them to collect. Now there are plants, and we have a list somewhere, that grow in Ohio that bloom 12 months a year. Some plants will be in blossom in December, another one will be in blossom in January. But they're very few and far between. So that will produce some, many pollen and a little nectar for the bees in the wintertime. But see they have to have food storage built up to make it through the winter.

L: What do they do during the winter?

C: They cluster up and keep the queen at around 98.8 degrees. Just under 99 degrees. Yeah, that's the ideal temperature they try to keep there for the queen. And they generate heat by doing what we probably call "catechetic exercises." You know, it's like where you pull but you know you're not moving anything. It's just, they move their muscles real slow to produce heat. Once the temperature gets down in the low 30s, they become inactive and they shut the queen down from laying eggs through the winter. Because you don't want eggs hatching out through the winter except when it's nice and warm, then they'll let her lay eggs again. If you get too few bees in a beehive and get a warm spell of ten days or a couple weeks and the queen lays a whole lot of eggs, then the remaining bees will spread out over those eggs, over the cells, on these frames and they'll sit there and work their muscles trying to keep that brood warm. They won't abandon their brood. And they'll sit there and die with honey all around if the cold snaps. If there's not another bee to take over to keep the brood warm, they'll just sit there and work themselves to death and starve.

L: How long can they live?

C: In the summertime a worker bee lives somewhere between 30-45 days. Then in the fall, the fall bees are fat. If you look at a worker bee in the summertime, it looks more like a racehorse. The bee that emerges in the fall from the brood, they're just plump. You

know, like fat pigs. They're almost physiologically different, cuz the bees in the fall are able to make it through the winter in case they can't produce any more brood. Then in the next spring then they produce these nice sleet bees that can fly fast and carry these big loads of nectar and pollen. Then on top of these brood area... See the bees live down here in these two deep supers here, for most people... then we put a quin-excluder on top of the brooder area. I don't know if you can see, it's kind of a grid type of deal there. And the queen can't get through it, a mature one. A young one can. Drones can't get through it either, cuz drones are big. Then on top of that we'll put surplus honey supers for the bees at the other end – cut comb honey for us to sell in the comb without extracting it or we'll have frames in there for extracting it where we'll get liquid honey. Then on top of the brood or the surplus honey supers we'll have what's called an inner-cover and it's just a thin cover here with an oval hole in the middle. We like to put an extra three holes in each end of our inner covers and then put a deeper lid on top that has extra ventilation. But then here's just a normal lid for a bee hive. That's what you need to start keeping bees other than, you gotta have some protective clothing, especially to protect your face, your eyes. I've never heard of a bee-keeper getting stung in the eye, but it could happen. And if it did you could use an eye.

L: How do you collect the honey?

C: Well, you've got to have protective honey. And a lot of bee-keepers just wear a hat and work with their bare hands. If you're an inspector you're not allowed to wear gloves because you could carry disease from one bee-keeper to another. Inspectors have to wash their hands in Clorox water. Then you have to have a hive tool...

L: Wait, what are inspectors?

C: Oh, inspectors. They're supposed to be one county inspector in each county. And the County Commissioner assign them to go out and inspect registered colonies of bees, to check for disease and the health of the colonies. As a service to the bee-keeper as well as other bee keepers in the county, to control disease and other parasites so you have healthy bees. The honey bees are a vital part of our food chain. If you got rid of the honey bees in the United States, you'd lose a third of our food supply.

L: Wow, really?

C: Yeah, a third of our food supply is either indirectly or directly...

L: Apples would be one...

C: That's direct.

L: What are some of the indirect ones?

C: Milk. Honey bees pollinate alfalfa seed fields, so dairy farmers can plant alfalfa to have high protein hay to feed their dairy cattle. That's an indirect link of food provided by the honey bee.

L: Do most crops require bees to pollinate the plants?

C: Well there's an article on the internet, I noticed a couple of nights ago. I think the Department of Agriculture in Michigan said they're concerned about the shortage of honey-bees for pollinating crops in Michigan. I think it said they had 135 major crops, of which 60 require insect pollination, which the honey bee is the most efficient pollinator. So, there is a shortage of honey-bees across the United States as we speak, because... Starting last October, out in the Southwest the bee-keepers were noticing huge losses of colonies of bees. They would be out in the bee yard gathering up dead colonies and while they was out there, they'd see two or three other bee hives collect at the entrance like they were going to swarm and the bees just take off and leave and not return. And they'd fled. There were no bees left. Um, so they've named this new disorder that started last fall, they call it "Colony Collapse Disorder." Cuz they don't know what it is. They don't know why the bees are flying away. For some reason there are no dead bodies left of honey bees to diagnose.

L: Is that happening in this area too?

C: Yes, I haven't heard of big losses here in Ohio yet, but over in Pennsylvania, I know three bee-keepers that have lost anywhere from 97 ½ percent of their bees to 70 percent.

L: Do you have any theories?

C: Now they claim that there's a fungus that's killing frogs. I've had some other bee-keepers... I was talking to a Township worker who mows cemeteries yesterday. And he said, "Well, that's interesting, I noticed last year that instead of having 8-10 yellow jacket nests in the ground cemeteries, I only had one of two that I ran across." Tons of bee-keepers tell me that they've noticed a decline and there's articles on the Internet and in some publications. There is a declining number of wasp as well as bees. They don't know why. They seem to be disoriented and confused. Why else would they leave the hive and leave their brood, which is unnatural? Honey-bees do not abandon their brood. When they leave all that's left is some emerging brood that also perishes because there's no nurse bees there to take care of the emerging baby bees. So, this is a problem.

L: In terms of actually putting the structure up in a location, is there a good place?

C: Yes, you want to always locate a bee-hive above a 100 year flood plain and a wind break from the prevailing winds of the West and the North are ideal. But more important is to locate the colony or the row of colonies so that as the sun comes up over the horizon every morning that the sun hits the front of the bee hive to warm it up. So that during the wintertime when it gets up in the mid to upper 30s and that sun hits the hive, the bees can take a cleansing flight. Cuz honey bees are a clean insect. They won't defecate within the

bee hive. The bee-hive is one of the more sterile environments where we have living insects or animals. They don't feed on people's pop or they're not interested in the frosting or the meringue on your pie or anything like that. The insects that bother you there are *wasp*, yellow jacket wasps. People call them bees and they have a think in the back of their mind that anything that flies and bothers them or anything and could sting... well, that's not true. Wasps are scavengers. They clean up the environment. They're the ones that are after the sweet stuff in your food at a picnic. And they give honey bees a bad name because they look similar. But they don't have any hair on them.

L: Aren't they bigger too?

C: Honey bees are plumper, but they're pretty close to the same size. But they have to have hair because when they get nectar and pollen from a blossom to another, the pollen sticks to their hairy body and then pollinates the next blossom. Otherwise they wouldn't be a pollinator.

L: So, you guys collect the honey how often?

C: Oh, well when we had a smaller operation we used to harvest the first crop of honey around the 1<sup>st</sup> of June then another crop around the 1<sup>st</sup> of August and then another crop in September or early October for our final harvest. So we used to harvest honey 2-4 times a year. But anymore, we just keep adding honey suppers and take our honey off in October. Then if the bees had a nectar dearth through the summer, they can just go up and bring some surplus honey stores for survival. We didn't lose any of our honey bees last August, but we had a number of customers whose bees failed and they died in August because they'd harvested in July. So then we had all that rain through the summer and the bees couldn't produce any honey and gather pollen so they had nothing to live on so they just starved. Most blossoms need 48 hours to be viable for a honeybee to work. So if this is the summertime and there are any number of different plants out in bloom and it stops raining this afternoon and then it doesn't rain for the next two days, but the morning of the third day, the bees aren't going to get anything to bring into the beehive for a good five days or more. And then, see people don't understand how fragile the bees are or how sensitive the bees are or how severely they're affected by the weather. In all the agricultural endeavors I've ever been involved in, the honey bee is the most fragile. Whether it's dairy, hogs, sheep, chickens... corn, beans, oats, and wheat... the bee is far more severely affected by *weather*.

L: What kind of weather?

C: Rain. Cold, wet, damp, humid. The bees need a couple nice nights of slow rain a week, and then the sunshine nice and bright.

L: Could the climate changes that are going on be affecting them?

C: Yeah, of course. The bees will be more affected than anything else. And the climate has changed rather dramatically since when I was a child. When I was 12, 13, maybe 14

years old, you hardly got any snow in the winter. It was nothing to get an inch of snow or a few feet. They'd cancel school! My job was to get up and shovel snow so the milk truck could come in and haul our milk away from the dairy herd. We had no mechanical means of clearing the driveway and that was a lot of work. So when my father would get the chores far enough along to let my mother finish the milking and stuff, then he'd drive a scoop shovel and the both of us would shovel.

L: So you grew up in this area?

C: Yeah, out in the Green Valley area, northwest of Mount Vernon. On the GreenValley Road.

L: You guys sold dairy, mostly?

C: Well, we milked around 30 cows twice a day and we had 125 brood use. We'd raise the lamb from lamb to finish. Took it to market. And we had at least 8-12 or more sows and we raised the pigs from furrow to finish. And until the AMA put out a lot of their negative...

L: What's the AMA?

C: The American Medical Association. They, let's see 4-5 years ago, reversed their stand on cholesterol from eggs. An egg or two for breakfast will lower your cholesterol, where back in the early 50s they were just harping it. People are getting all this heart disease, cholesterol is building up, saying "people should not eat eggs." So it just killed the egg market, so we got rid of the poultry, because my dad said, "Well, the chickens have lost eggs at least two years in a row and the dairy, hogs, and sheep have had to carry 'em, and they're just a leach on the farm so we're just going to get rid of the chickens." No more laying hens.

L: Was it difficult to make a living as a farmer back then?

C: Hmm... Easier back then than today! You didn't have to milk 70-100 or more cows or... you just didn't have to farm 600 - 1000 acres to make a living. You could make a living back then farming 100 - 200 acres.

L: Why do farms need to be so big now?

C: Because... okay, the farmer is probably the most efficient producer of any production being done in the world. The American farmer is the most efficient worker, because, we've got machinery now. Instead of using a two or four row corn planter like we had back when I was a kid, if someone had a four row corn planter that was a big corn planter, now they have corn planters that are 18-24 rows around here. Can you imagine that? I mean, machinery costs so much today that to service that debt and pay it off, you've got to farm multiple hundreds and hundreds of acres. If you're into that equipment, you've got to be farming 3-5,00 acres. We don't have very many farmers left anymore. Less

than 2 percent of the population in the US are farmers. Back when I was a kid I think it was around 30 percent. And the price of corn was really cheap back then...

L: Did that have to do with subsidies?

C: Ah, yeah, some of it. American politicians are pretty sophisticated people, especially our US Congressmen and US Senators, because they control the purse strings. They know that a well-fed population... to just make sure that everyone can afford a reasonable nutrition if not more nutrition than they oughta be getting, because the obesity you see today... but, a hungry population makes for a population that's uneasy. They're not at rest, but a population with a full stomach is a contented population and they're easy to govern and manage and they're happy so they won't give political leaders much flack. But if that ever turns around, then I don't know what will happen. You probably heard on the news in the last month down in Mexico, they've had some riots because their tacos are so high-priced now. Well, they're using so much corn to turn into ethanol to hold the price of fuel down. So, what we're not spending to put in our fuel tank, we're going to spend at the grocery store.

L: Wait, so with the corn production, how has that changed over the years?

C: Oh, back when I was a child, most farms in Knox County were general farms being that they had at least two kinds of livestock and raised at least three to four or more kinds of crops to feed that livestock. Well, today most farmers in Knox County have no livestock and most farmers today are raising two major crops – corn and soybeans. Maybe a little hay because they've got a horse, but it's very little hay. Or maybe they have a few beef cattle, but see the majority of the farming being done if you calculate it out by the acres being farmed...

L: Where is this corn going?

C: It's going into food and now we've got more than ever going into ethanol.

L: How is that going to affect us?

C: Food has to go up. Milk has gone up \$2.00 since the 1<sup>st</sup> of December. Dairy farmers needed that, but the dairy farmers cost of production is going up because their feed is going up. Corn has doubled in price in the last 2 ½ or 3 years. Well, milk, beef, eggs, all these things have to cost more money or they're not going to be produced. When it costs these farmers more money to feed these livestock, you know, more per pound, it's not going to be there and consequently it's not going to be available on the food shelf.

L: Do you think that ethanol is going to solve our energy crisis?

C: No. Ethanol production is an inefficient... it's kind of a negative sort of... it takes more energy to produce a unit of energy by ethanol than what's in the ethanol. It's actually contributing to the shortage of energy. That's not the answer, at least not the way

it's been produced. I think ethanol may be someday coming from other cellulose crops. I've got a customer in Athens, he's got a little farm that he's built up, he's got a wind generator out, he's got some solar panels on his roofs and he's an engineer and he's working on building himself an ethanol producing unit. It won't be ethanol, it'll be methanol. He told me some kind of crop that he's going to produce, harvest the crop, it's a grass-type crop, and it's a lot more effective than producing corn or beans to produce soy diesel.

L: So, where did you sell your corn?

C: Either to the Farmer's Exchange or the Foot Elevator up in Fredericktown. But most of my corn went through our livestock. I only sold surplus corn that we didn't need.

L: Were your crops subsidized?

C: No, I didn't participate in that because I wasn't that big of a farmer. I was only farming around a hundred or so acres and working in town.

L: So, smaller farmers don't usually want subsidies.

C: Well, it's usually not worth their time.

L: You have to do all the paperwork...

C: Yeah, and the extension agent has to come out and measure your fields and this and that... it is there, but see I don't like the idea of subsidies because what it's doing is taking away from non-producers... I see the principle, but anyway it's a tool of politicians to have cheap food. To buy votes. You know, they buy votes with the subsidies, they get the vote from the farmer and most probably realize the ones that are supporting the subsidy programs. And then people get their food stamps and people of all income scales realize that they've got a nice bountiful supply of inexpensive food and it's because of subsidies. You go to most any other county in the world and you're spending more than 17 percent of your income on food. In the US, it's around 17 percent. That's cheap.

L: Do you think we need government reform to actually reduce subsidies?

C: If you do, you're going to have to be very careful about doing it or you'll just upset the whole apple cart, because the structure is in place and it's working. And you're not going to convince political leaders that they need to fix something that's working. And it might not be right to extort money from one sector of the population to give to another. Why don't you just let the market regulate itself? Because it will – a free market will regulate itself. If farmers produce too much corn/beans/eggs/milk... milk is a huge subsidy thing, and they've reduced the subsidy a lot of milk, but a lot of dairy farmers have gone out of business too...

L: So, certain farmers will go out business when too much is being produced?

C: Right. That makes for an unable food supply. And see, back in the 80s, somebody got a great idea in Washington to have the "Food Commodity Program," to give food to low income families and they did it monthly to empty out our food reserves, because back then we had an eighteen month food reserve. Today we have less than 90 days, I think. That is federal food warehouses. The US government had 18 month's food supply in warehouses. So if we had a crop failure, the US population could eat for 18 months without anything coming in off of US farms. Well, they've emptied those warehouses down.

L: What happened to it?

C: It was a monthly commodity food distribution to low income people. And I was paralyzed at that time, so that made me low income. I'm still not able to earn income. Well, we had one of those cards. And once a month there was a certain amount of stuff every month. Butter – they had huge amounts of butter. But that's been way scaled back and so now if we'd have some type of agricultural disaster, we could have people starve here. It's not in the Constitution to have those reserves, but overtime Congress saw a need to have them. They established them and now they've emptied them down. I just don't know.

L: So what do you think the role of government should be, in terms of agriculture?

C: Well, there are services that government can provide for agriculture that otherwise can't really be provided, because either farmers wouldn't be able to afford. Say, like the Feltsbuild laboratory, Maryland. It's a federal lab and it's where all honeybee samples are sent, whether they are bees taken and put in a little vile of alcohol and sent in to be checked for tracheal mites or to check for brood. All over the United States, it all goes over to Feltsbuild Maryland. They've got all kinds of labs there. In fact, a couple of the labs down in Texas and Louisiana are testing this sudden collapse of bee colonies. Packaged bees that came in from New Zealand collapsed first...

L: When you say the bees come in "packages" what does that mean...?

C: Oh, okay. In fact, right at the present time we are taking package bee orders.

L: Are a lot of people in the area starting them up?

C: Yes. We mail these packages out in the post-office. And most of our packages are three pounds and we also have two pounds. And a package of bees is 70 lbs of bees and a queen. That consists of a package of bees to start up a colony. (Shows me a package) They're filled up to the top edge of the stick. The queen will be in a separate little thing.

L: How long can they live in there?

C: About a week. But there will be a lot of dead little bees in there if they're in there for a week. That's how we transport packages of bees for beekeepers to replenish beehives that have died for whatever reason.

L: Do you guys give lots of tours?

C: No, we give a lot of lectures like this. A beekeeper comes to us or a family, I like it when a mom, dad, and kid come. And we can go through all these things on how to set up a beehive that will take 1-3 hours per new beekeeper. I can diagnose people over the telephone and put them at easy too.

L: That's great.

C: Because a beehive is an investment. There's not a huge amount of money, but a couple hundred dollars or more per beehive times however many beehives you have. And that's not including your protective gear.

L: So what would it cost overall/

C: At least \$200, but it shouldn't cost more than \$250. For \$250 dollars, you should be able to have at least two suppers on it and then it depends on what type of lid. But if you take good care of it, we've seen some 4-H students that got 100 percent return in their first year. Now, that's rare.

L: Very interesting. Well, I guess we should wrap things up. Thank you so much for your time. Do you have anything else to share?

C: Well, lots more but I'll give you my card in case you have more questions.

L: Sure, that'd be great.

[End of Tape]