

*"If there's something strange in your neighborhood  
Who you gonna call?  
Ghostbusters!  
If there's something weird  
And it don't look good  
Who you gonna call?  
Ghostbusters!"*

— Ray Parker Jr.

I've had people call me and say, "I think my colony may have American Foulbrood... what do you think?" My immediate response is, "I think you should call somebody who knows a lot more about American Foulbrood than I do!" On the surface, that advice may sound flippant but I am dead serious. In North Carolina, we are extremely fortunate to have a Department of Agriculture that recognizes the importance of honey bees as a factor input to agricultural production and puts its money (actually, our money) where its mouth is... or at least more so than most other states.

Did you know that North Carolina has six full-time, year-round, professional honey bee apiary inspectors whose only job is to make sure that our honey bees are healthy and our beekeepers are well-informed? Six people to cover an entire state may not seem like a lot, but [South Carolina](#) has only one part-time apiary inspector who only does this job a half day per week. [Pennsylvania](#) only hires temps (college kids?) to act as inspectors during the summer months.

If you don't believe that we are uniquely fortunate, get on the [New York](#) or [New Jersey](#) Department of Agriculture websites and try to figure out how to request an apiary inspection. I gave up after about ten minutes of searching.

We have a lot to be proud of as North Carolinians, and our professional apiary inspection service is certainly one of those things.

### *What does the Apiary Program do?*

The [NC Honey Bee Act of 1977](#) states, "*The General Assembly hereby declares that it is in the public interest to promote and protect the*



Chief Apiary Inspector Don Hopkins examines nucs at a supplier's bee yard. These nucs will be available for sale... if they pass inspection. Photo: Lewis Cauble

*bee and honey industry in North Carolina and to authorize the Commissioner of Agriculture and the Board of Agriculture to perform services and conduct activities to promote, improve, and enhance the bee and honey industry in North Carolina particularly relative to small beekeepers; to regulate all bees of the super-family Apoidea in any stage of development; the causal agents of their disease or disorders, and their pests; to protect the bee and honey industry in North Carolina from bee diseases and disorders and to provide regulatory services in the areas of pollination of plants, honeybee poisonings, thefts, bee management and marketing."* That is a long-winded way of saying that the NC Apiary Program exists to protect our NC honey bees and enhance the NC beekeeping industry.

A big part of that role is to guarantee the health of honey bees that move into or across our State. You may not realize it, but "*(t)he transportation or importation into North Carolina from any other state or country of bees ... in any stage of development, the causal agents of their diseases or disorders, their pests, their products, nests or hives, and associated equipment are prohibited...*" except under conditions set forth by the [NCDA&CS](#). In other words, bringing bees and bee equipment into NC is a privilege, not a right. It falls upon our Apiary Inspectors to ensure that the bees in our State are "good bees" that are free of

devastating diseases so the bad ones don't mess up the rest of us.

One way they do this is by working cooperatively with agencies in other states. For example, if Georgia inspectors certify that a load of bees that are going to pollinate cucumbers in Eastern NC are "good bees", then NCDA&CS will let them in. However the old adage "trust, but verify" applies here. Once in NC the bees will be inspected by our people to ensure that they are happy with them. In fact, the [law](#) requires that "(h)oneybees requiring an entry permit which are moved into North Carolina from other states or countries shall be placed under post-entry quarantine for a period of one year after entry. These bees shall not be moved from the initial location to other locations in North Carolina while under quarantine."

The same sort of cooperative relationship exists for the sale of packages from out-of-state suppliers. Sellers must have a NC permit, but the initial inspection is done by the state regulatory agency where they reside.

With only six inspectors for all of NC, clearly the inspection service relies on the cooperation of NC beekeepers as well. While inspectors have the legal right to inspect any hives they choose to, and also the legal right to dispose of any that pose a threat to the State's healthy bees, they usually aren't going to even know where hives are unless we invite them to visit. So we must do our part to keep NC safe and healthy for our bees and beekeepers. The inspectors are our partners, not our adversaries: their goals are exactly the same as ours.

### *Doesn't the Cooperative Extension Service do the same thing? Are the Inspectors part of Cooperative Extension?*

Extension work is done under a Federal mandate in all 50 states. In North Carolina, Cooperative Extension is conducted by our two land-grant universities, NCSU and NC A&T. We are fortunate to have people such as Dr. David Tarpy at NCSU, Debbie Roos in the field in Chatham County, Mart Bumgarner in Orange

County and many others who support beekeepers through Cooperative Extension efforts. They conduct research, consult and generally spread knowledge to all of us, "extending" the reach of our universities across all 100 counties and the Cherokee Nation. However they are not part of the regulatory arm (or any other part) of NCDA&CS and they are not charged with conducting apiary inspections.

It is easy to get the Apiary Program of the NCDA&CS confused with Cooperative Extension because not only do their goals overlap, but their staffs often work closely with each other, consulting and assisting with various projects as needed. They are "all in this together", and for us to be successful beekeepers we must be in there too.

### *That's all well and good, but surely their services must be expensive, right? I've only got a few hives and I can't afford to spend a lot on them.*

If you call your apiary inspector about a problem or he/she comes out for a regular inspection, their services have already been paid for by your tax dollars. They don't cost you anything. Nothing. Nada. Why waste time on YouTube trying to find what BigBeeGuy341 has done when you can get genuinely expert advice, for free, from your very own professional? (Besides, how much credibility should you give to people who don't even use their real names?)

### *Okay, but I have a well-developed inferiority complex and I don't want to bother these folks... my problems are trivial compared to the important beekeepers they deal with, right? I would be embarrassed for such a highly-trained person who is used to dealing with big-time commercial beekeepers to come out and look at my dinky little hives.*

Pop quiz: how many big-time commercial beekeepers do you think there are in North Carolina? Thousands? Hundreds? Dozens?

Wrong! There are only about a half dozen to a dozen commercial beekeepers in our state. Around six to twelve people. That's it. There are probably a few hundred folks who keep enough hives to make a little extra money, but all of the thousands and thousands that are left are little bitty hobbyists just like you and me. If our state apiary inspectors only dealt with "the big guys", there would be absolutely no reason to have six full-time inspectors. Almost all of the services they give are to hobbyists with a couple or so hives. Inspector Will Hicks once told me that he prefers to help the guy with one or two hives because it is a lot easier! You can't argue with that!

With regard to "trivial" problems: American Foulbrood is the scariest bee disease we have (see October 2015's "[Wisdom Wins Out Regarding AFB Treatments](#)"). One infected colony can spew the disease all over the surrounding area, regardless of how many hives the beekeeper owns. That's why our inspectors are concerned with everyone's colony's health, not just certain people's. Their goal is to make sure that "trivial" problems stay trivial.

Still not convinced? Go back and look at the legal remit of the Apiary Program that I quoted earlier. It says they are "... to perform services and conduct activities to promote, improve, and enhance the bee and honey industry in North Carolina **particularly relative to small beekeepers.**" So looking after the little guy is right there in the law!

*Will the inspectors laugh at me because I am doing stuff wrong? Will I get in trouble if they think I am neglecting my bees?*

Of course not. Even though our Apiary Inspectors do have regulatory authority, they aren't the Bee Police – you won't get into trouble with them for doing something stupid. If that were possible, we wouldn't have any beekeepers left in North Carolina, including me. Think of them as the Health Department for your bees, the friendly folks who want to help you make everything better.

*Okay, this all makes sense. But when should I call my inspector?*

Hopefully you are a member of a county bee club and have access to folks who can give reasonable answers to basic questions like "how do I catch a swarm?" and "why do my bees hang out on the front of the hive in July?" But if you have concerns about diseases, pests or other aspects of colony health, that's what the NC Apiary Program is all about. So if you want to know what that strange smell is coming from in the brood nest, why your bee larvae are brown instead of white or why those package bees you bought on-line from Texas just killed your cat, call your inspector! And our inspectors work closely with their colleagues in the NCDA&CS Pesticide Division, so call them immediately if you suspect your bees have been killed by pesticides. (See July 2016's "[Save the Bees, Starting with Your Own](#)" for more on this topic.) (Please call your inspector before you call the television station; most so-called "pesticide kills" turn out to be Varroa-related or starvation.)

Not sure whether you should call? If you have to ask, then go ahead and call!

*Wow, this is great. I'm gonna call as soon as I finish reading this article. But wait, I don't know her/his number or even her/his name. How do I find that?*

The assignment territories and contact information for our Apiary Inspectors are on the NCDA&CS website under [Plant Industry > Plant Protection Section > Apiary Inspection Services](#). If that is too much navigation for you to handle, look on the NC State Beekeepers Association website under [Resources > Apiary Inspection](#). Or if even that is too much effort, I have appended a document provided by NCDA&CS which has a map and text description of assignment areas with the name and contact information for each inspector.

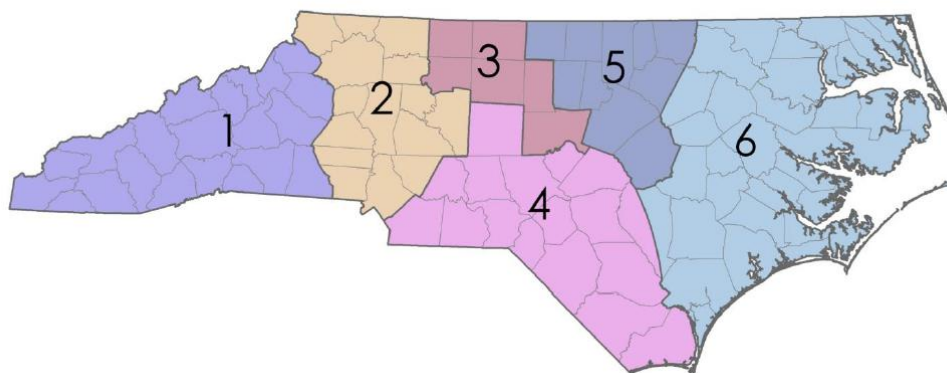
Now you have no excuses... call your inspector!

Special thanks to Chief Apiary Inspector Don Hopkins for his review of this article and suggestions for improvement, and Mountain Region Inspector Lewis Cauble for his support and photo. (Chart below from <http://www.ncagr.gov/plantindustry/plant/apiary/apiaryinspectors.htm>)

Randall Austin is a NC Master Beekeeper who keeps a few honey bee hives in northern Orange County, NC. He can be reached at [s.randall.austin@gmail.com](mailto:s.randall.austin@gmail.com).

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**NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services**  
**Plant Industry Division – Plant Protection Section**  
**Apiary Inspectors Work Areas**



Apiary Inspector's Names, Assigned Areas, and Contact Information			
<b>Area 1:</b>	Lewis Cauble	Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Cleveland, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Yancey	(828) 230-4544
<b>Area 2:</b>	Gregory Fariss	Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Cabarrus, Catawba, Davidson, Davie, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Surry, Wilkes, Yadkin	(336) 671-2883
<b>Area 3:</b>	Don Hopkins	Alamance, Chatham, Forsyth, Guilford, Rockingham, Stokes	(919) 218-3310
<b>Area 4:</b>	Nancy Ruppert	Anson, Bladen, Brunswick, Columbus, Cumberland, Harnett, Hoke, Lee, Montgomery, Moore, Randolph, Richmond, Robeson, Sampson (western half), Scotland, Stanly, Union	(910) 690-9555
<b>Area 5:</b>	William Hicks	Caswell, Durham, Franklin, Granville, Johnston, Orange, Person, Vance, Wake, Warren	(919) 691-0022
<b>Area 6:</b>	Adolphus Leonard	Beaufort, Bertie, Camden, Carteret, Chowan, Craven, Currituck, Dare, Duplin, Edgecombe, Gates, Greene, Halifax, Hertford, Hyde, Jones, Lenoir, Martin, Nash, New Hanover, Northampton, Onslow, Pamlico, Pasquotank, Pender, Perquimans, Pitt, Sampson (eastern half), Tyrell, Washington, Wayne, Wilson	(252) 916-3444