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June 11-15, 2018

New program to train master beekeepers



Travis K. Fischer
Mid-America
Publishing

Iowa Work Force Development is buzzing this week after announcing the launch of a new addition to the Registered Apprenticeship program.

Last year, a chance encounter at a farmers market led Martha Garcia-Tappa of Iowa Workforce Development to meet with Phil Crandall, President of Crandall Farms Inc.

"I went down to the farmers market on a Saturday, and I found this awesome little stand selling honey," said Garcia-Tappa.

Though based in Illinois, just a few miles away from the Mississippi River, Crandall Farms does much of their business in Iowa, not only selling product but raising bees in Iowa based apiary yards.

"We've got more bees in Iowa than we do in Illinois," said Crandall.

Crandall told Garcia-Tappa he was in need of some extra hands and Garcia-Tappa had just the program for him. Working together, they developed a beekeeping apprenticeship through Registered Apprenticeship program.



"We started sitting down and chatting about it and pretty much spent all winter getting things ready," said Crandall. "This spring we went ahead and advertised for a candidate and got several applications."

To create an apprentice program, business owners must set out a plan of on-site training, classroom instruction, and wage progression. Employers can receive grants to help pay for the educational expense and, by the end of it, apprentices receive a nationally recognized certificate.

This month, Crandall hired his bee keeper to-be, Benjamin Westerman, a graduate from Northwest Missouri State University with degrees in biology and wildlife ecology and conservation. Over the next 800 work hours, Westerman will receive specialized training needed to become a master beekeeper, benefiting both

employee and employer.

The apprenticeship won't entirely be hands-on learning. Crandall says that Westerman will be sent to educational seminars in Minnesota, Illinois, and even Nebraska to expand on his knowledge.

"We'll be sending him to a few classes. He'll be doing a lot of reading and have tons of hands on work," said Crandall. "He's been excellent. He's thirsty for knowledge."

Training Westerman to such a specific job not only increases his knowledge base, but also frees time for Crandall to explore other projects, such as breeding hardier queens capable of surviving Midwest weather conditions.

"Ben will help with the day-to-day operations so I can concentrate on this Illinois Queen Initiative," said Crandall.

Beekeeping is far from the only apprenticeship program that Iowa Workforce Development helps create. Another apprenticeship program was just registered for a business in Muscatine for food service management. The Department of Labor has thousands of occupations that can become programs, bringing together people with a desire to learn a trade with a business that needs people with specialized skills.

Iowa Workforce Development is looking to expand the program, having just received a \$2 million

grant to create more programs for employers, particularly in the fields of healthcare, manufacturing, and IT.

"There are lots of occupations that you can make into a registered apprenticeship," said Garcia-Tappa. "It's just a great opportunity for businesses to get the skilled labor that we need for the long term and to keep employees for a longer period of time."

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