

OP-186 [Beekeeping for Rural Development] Prison beekeeping programs in the state of Georgia, USA

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Background/Purpose

Prisons in the United States offer vocational education in hopes of reducing recidivism. In the state of Georgia in the Southeastern United States, beekeeping classes have been offered in some prison facilities since 2015.

Problem/description

Repeated incarceration is linked to poverty, lack of job training, and mental illness in the United States.

Methodology

Prison beekeeping classes give participants the opportunity to learn the craft of beekeeping. At the end of each year students are tested using the Certified, Journeyman and Master beekeeper protocols outlined in the University of Georgia Master Beekeeper Program. Using on-site hives, the students care for 4-14 hives, harvest honey, wax, and propolis and raise queens.

Results and conclusion

Since 2015, 235 incarcerated individuals have passed the test for the Certified level, 19 passed the Journeyman level and 7 have achieved the Master Beekeeper level. Since 2022, students have been asked to fill out a survey regarding the beekeeping programs. Participants responses are overwhelmingly positive. They reported increased awareness of the importance of caring for the environment, increased ability to work collectively as a community, gratitude for forming relationships with others from different backgrounds that they would otherwise not have sought out, the value of being able to act as a teacher and mentor for those who continue to the Journeyman and Master levels, an appreciation for having something interesting to talk to their loved ones about, and hopes that they will be able to continue keeping bees upon release.

Practical implications for beekeepers

While there is known value in providing vocational training for incarcerated individuals to reduce recidivism, the therapeutic benefits of beekeeping could be considered even more valuable. The opportunity to work together to care for living beings, the intellectual stimulation of learning beekeeping, and the rewards of passing tests are all opportunities for these mostly disadvantaged populations to heal, for them to be positive community member while incarcerated, and to return to their communities better equipped for success. More broadly, prison beekeeping programs increase awareness of the importance of honey bees among staff and the general incarcerated populations.



BEEKEEPING BEHIND BARS



Photo: Ben Rouse

Julia Mahood *Master Crafts Beekeeper, Georgia, USA*

*Faces of
incarcerated
people are
blurred in this
presentation to
comply with
Department of
Corrections rules*



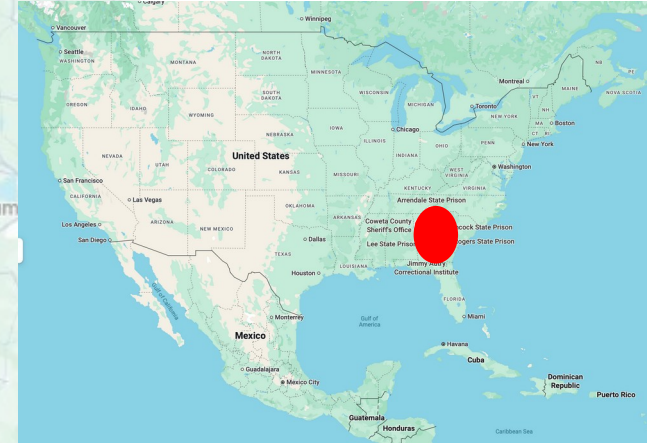
Photo by Kelly Kline

Georgia Prison Beekeeping Programs



Since 2014:

Smith SP
Ware SP
Arrendale SP
Dooly SP
Burris CI
Lee SP
Autry SP
Georgia SP
Hancock SP
Atlanta TC
Hall County CI
Rogers SP
Metro TC
Coweta CI
Whitworth WF



Prisons facilities
range from
medium security
to **maximum**
security



Each facility
has ~6-12
hives on
campus



Students
participate in
every aspect
of
beekeeping,
from hive
management
to honey
processing





BEEKEEPING

is
the
new

BLACK





Arrendale State Prison • 15 locked doors and gates to get to the apiary

**Classes
meet weekly
February
through
October**



University Of Georgia Master Beekeeper

*Levels completed in
Georgia programs:*

**254 Certified
17
Journeyman**



Honey is
shared with
the staff and
community, it
is illegal to sell





Prison programs
compete against
each other at the
Georgia Beekeepers
Association state
honey show



How are
these
programs
funded?

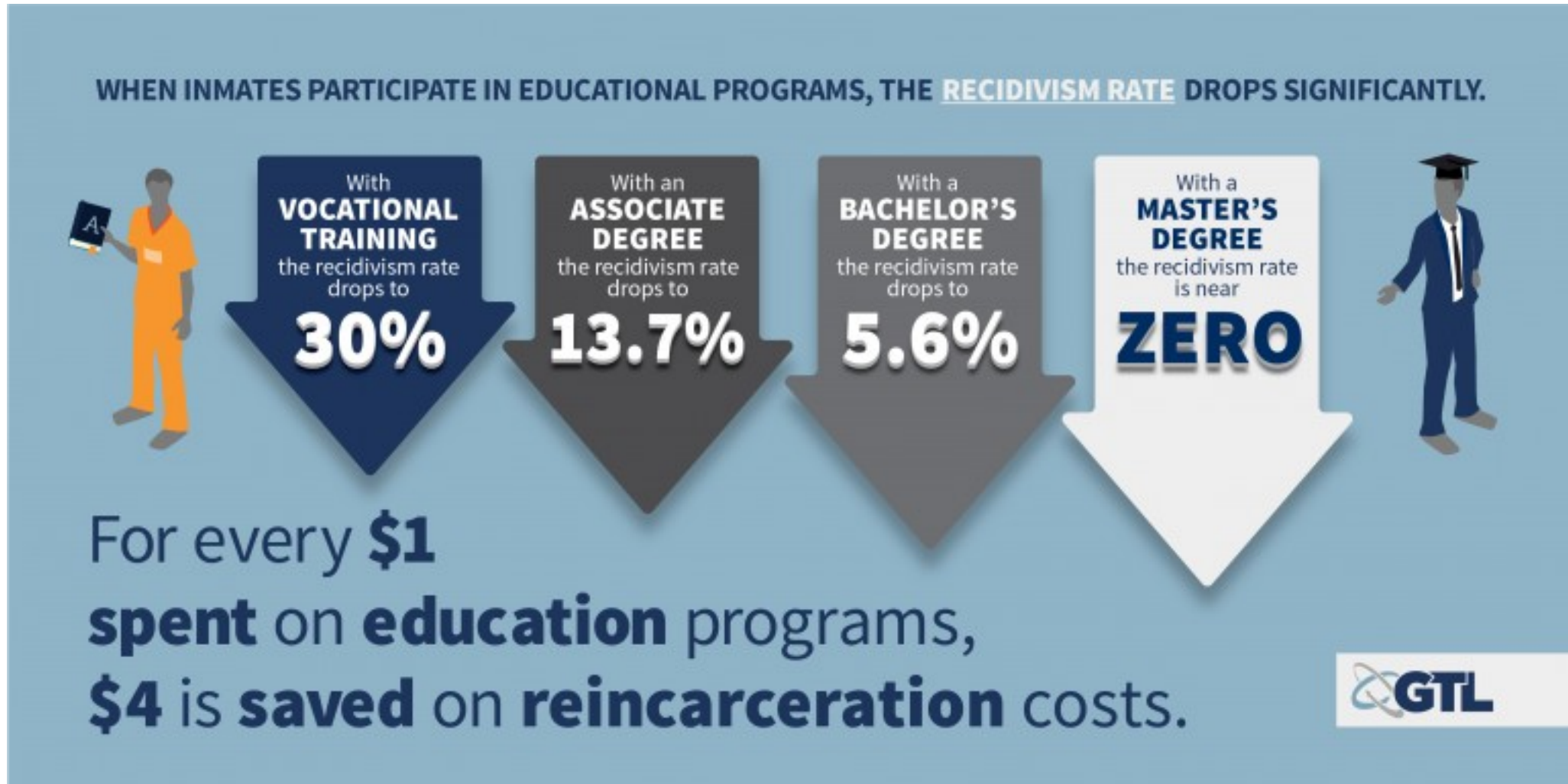


Prison is
boring.

How to pass the time?

- Work details
 - Vocational classes
-

In the US 70% of formerly incarcerated people are rearrested within 3 years



Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education
A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults
Lois M. Davis, Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, Jessica Saunders, Jeremy N. V. Miles

Vocational training isn't
the most important
benefit of prison
beekeeping

The mental health benefits
are incredibly valuable



The connection to nature is healing



***Working together in a diverse
community***



*It is nice to have
something interesting for
me to be able to tell my
family about*
– Beekeeping student
at Burruss Correctional
Institution

***Beekeeping knowledge is something
they can share with loved ones***



Building leadership skills



Sense of pride and accomplishment

“It has been the most rewarding thing I have been able to do in prison.”

– Beekeeping student at Rogers State Prison



***It's
rewardin
g for the
voluntee
rs too!***



Virginia Webb



David Hollomon



Letters From Behind Bars

— Jennifer Berry

Several years ago, I wrote an article about the first class to become certified bookkeepers in a maximum security prison through our Georgia Master Bookkeeper program. That time, four additional prisons had added bookkeeping programs with another one on the way. To date, over seventy inmates have become certified bookkeepers and have been given jobs in the prison system. Our job has been to assist with the program and personally administer the Georgia Master Bookkeeper exam since the students had no bookkeeper on staff. So far, every student that has taken the exam has not only passed but has passed with the color grade. The average score for the inmates was well into the 80% range. I know, because I was the 100% range. To this day however they are extremely committed to, so much so that some students have to learn to read in order to take the exam.

The Georgia Ma-

The Georgia Master Beekeeper Program is an intensive four-step program designed to educate students about all things dealing with bees and beekeeping. It allows participants to not only increase their knowledge but to hopefully take that knowledge and teach others about beekeeping and the importance of pollinators. The four levels of beekeeper certification are Certified, Journeyman, Master and Master Craftsman.

This past June, I and Westley Hestler, (UGA lab technician), traveled to Lee Arrendale State Prison (all women's facility) to administer

the Georgia Master Beekeeper examination. By the end of the day we added seven more qualified certified beekeepers to our roster. But even more impressive was the addition of the five women into the Journeyman rank. We are very proud of all the students that have passed the various levels in our Master Beekeeper Program, but have been exceptionally proud of those that have done so behind bars. As you can imagine this is not an easy task in the situation and the inability to access information.

A few weeks

A few weeks after the exam letters, I received a packet wanted to share them with you (with their permission of course). These are the letters from the five ladies that have become the first Journeyman Beekeepers behind bars.

Ladrina Johnson,
Journeyman Beekeeper
I cannot begin

cannot begin to explain how beekeeping has changed my life and helped me to know myself in ways that 23 years of life had yet to do. Learning the life cycle and overall ways of the honey bee has given me a new perspective on my life. Loyalty, sacrifice, one's anatomy and genetics are all things that make up a good colony, thus they make up a good life. As poetic and cliché as that sounds, it's the God's honest

truth. I love beekeeping, and all that it has given me over the past two and a half years. Julia Mahood pushed me and was patient with me. She also encouraged and helped me to believe that I not only could do this and go all the way through the certification levels, but that I was actually good at it. It always feels good to be good at something, and my *something* lies in the honey bee.

My experience does not stop here at
 away from this 15 year hostage situation :-)
 ~wink!— it will definitely be my love of, and
 knack for beekeeping, and the knowledge
 that I've gained and want to spread. The
 honey bee and all pollinators are so vital to
 our existence and it is pertinent that more
 people not just know, but love and understand
 them, as I myself have grown to love and
 understand them. #fortheloveofhoney

April Ulrich,
Journeyman Beekeeper
The 2016 new sign-up at

The 2016 new Beekeeping Class sign-up sheet, that appeared on my dorm wall might as well have leaped at me, grabbed my shoulders, and shook my body as nothing else in my decades of incarceration has done. Even more earthshaking took place when I was accepted from the hundreds that applied for this brand-new vocational class.

I'm bee-dazzled, you might say. Upon opening our beginner class book *First Lessons in Beekeeping*, I read the words describing beekeeping as an art and science. I have always loved nature and art as well as



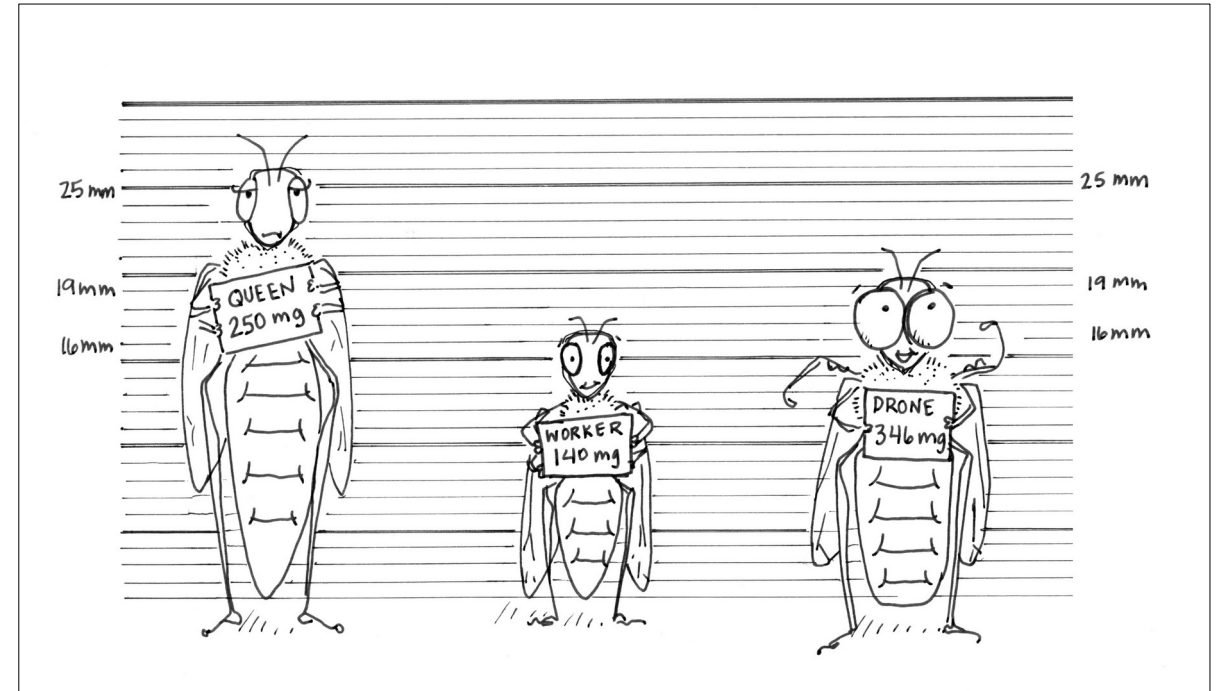
Ladri.



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Questions?



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Instagram

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