Honey bees are essential to US agriculture: The annual value of the increased yield and quality of agricultural products attributable to honey bee pollination was recently estimated to be $14.6 billion. But expanding pest problems (Fig. 2) are making it increasingly difficult to maintain healthy, productive colonies. Techniques and tools exist to mitigate these problems (Fig. 3), but many beekeepers are unaware of them or of their correct use. With funding from Southern SARE, we conducted training sessions for county Extension agents and beekeeper association representatives in Alabama and Tennessee on sustainable honey bee pest management, fundamentals of beekeeping and pollination.

Thirty-six agents and seven beekeepers attended the three training workshops held in Tennessee (at Jackson, Nashville and Knoxville) in summer 2004. Four workshops were held in Alabama in summer 2005 at Tuscaloosa, Dothan, Auburn and Huntsville. Because of restructuring of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) and reduced travel funding, fewer agents (10) attended these workshops; however, many more beekeepers participated (76), perhaps because ACES does not have a resident Extension Apiculturist.

Workshops consisted of a 3-hour presentation (Fig. 4) beginning with basic honey bee biology and the fundamentals of beekeeping and pollination. Most lecture time was spent on pest biology and management. Workshops concluded with a 2-hour hands-on inspection of honey bee colonies (Fig. 5). Extension agents were provided new beekeeping protective gear (veil and gloves) and a hive tool; and educational materials: a video on the importance of honey bees as pollinators, and handouts and powerpoint presentations on CD. Pre- and post-workshop tests were completed by participants to determine their comprehension and retention of lecture material. (Not all participants completed the tests.)

Workshops were well received: 94% and 97% of attendees in Tennessee and Alabama, respectively, thought the work-shops were excellent or very good; 100% and 97% rated the materials provided to them as excellent or very good. Improvements in post-workshop test scores indicate participants, except for experienced beekeepers, substantially improved their knowledge of beekeeping, pollination and honey bee pest management (Figs. 6 & 7). Our efforts should improve beekeeping and pest management practices, resulting in more honey bee colonies and pollinators for US agriculture.