

The Board have received a number of communications in relation to the supply of sub-standard nuclei. All Beekeepers who supply nuclei are reminded of the agreed standard as set out below. Beginners are encouraged to seek guidance from their own Association or bring a more experienced Beekeeper with them when purchasing nuclei. All suppliers of nuclei have a responsibility to adhere to the standard, your support in this is appreciated.

CRITERIA FOR PRODUCTION AND SALE OF NUCLEI

The production and sale of nuclei can be a rewarding enterprise for many beekeepers as the demand for bees grow year on year, generally from beginners. Beginners don't quite know what to expect when purchasing bees and so FIBKA has set criteria for a standard nucleus for the information of both producers and purchasers as follows:-

The production and availability of nuclei is paramount to the success of the beekeeping industry in Ireland. Without the constant availability of nuclei, beginners cannot enter the craft and may be tempted to import. It is therefore very important that nuclei are of a certain standard before being offered for sale especially to the unsuspecting and often over enthusiastic beginner. Bees should always have the following characteristics:

- Good honey producers
- Non swarming strain
- Disease resistance
- Docile

Bees with the above traits are suitable for the breeding of queens and the production of nuclei. Nuclei are usually classed as Over-Wintered or Summer/Autumn produced.

Criteria for an Over-Wintered Nuclei

Over-Wintered nuclei offer many advantages to the buyer. Firstly, the colony is well established with a queen that is proven and the possibility of collecting a crop of honey with proper management. The risks associated with over wintering are no longer an issue if purchased in late April and the first inspection is completed by the seller assuring that all is within the necessary standard. The following should be considered when purchasing:

- Queen must not be more than one year old, bred from good quality native stock.
- Queen should be clipped and marked.
- Queen egg laying viability should be greater than 95%.
- Queen should be laying in a minimum of 2/3 of at least 2 frames.
- Frames should be standard Hoffman type all of the same design.
- No frames should be broken or damaged in anyway.
- All combs should be in a good and clean condition, preferably less than one season old.
- Comb containing excess drone or unusable cells should be rejected.
- Combs should where possible be free of chalk brood.

- All cells should be checked for AFB and the nuclei rejected if any signs or symptoms of AFB are found.
- Nuclei should be checked for signs and symptoms of EFB in April and rejected if found.
- At least four combs should be covered by bees.
- Bees should be free of Nosema & Acarine.
- Adequate stores should be present to last the colony at least 7 days.

Colonies will vary from season to season. However, the importance of not selling underperforming bees cannot be over emphasized. It is better for the seller to keep nuclei an extra two weeks rather than off-loading to a beginner who discovers that there is no return from their investment and commitment at the end of the year.

Criteria for Summer/Autumn Nuclei

Many beekeepers make up nuclei as a swarm control method during late May/June. This is quite an acceptable method of beekeeping and can produce good quality nuclei. The same criteria applies to these nuclei as to the over winter one but the following should also be taken into consideration.

- Queen should not be raised from a colony that exhibits traits that are not specified at the start of this section.
- Queens should not be raised from eggs or larvae in the nuclei.
- Point of hatching queen cells, virgin queens or mated queen from a breeder queen should be used to head up the nuclei.
- Nuclei should only be sold after the queen is laying showing sealed brood, preferably on several frames in order to assess her viability.
- It may not be practical to clip a young queen but the option of marking her for ease of identification should be considered.

The summer nuclei should be ready for sale end of July/early August. There is still adequate time for the beginner to manage it to an adequate size colony without too much difficulty.

Nuclei made at the end of or after the honey flow will again build up but the possibility of losing them over the winter is greater. Often there is inadequate time to assess the queen. If the season is drawing to a close it is more prudent for the purchaser to get the seller to over winter the nuclei and then purchase it the following spring. Order your nuclei in August/September.

All sales of nuclei should include an advisory leaflet as to what is needed as the colony expands. Sellers should keep records of all sold nuclei for traceability.