

Crucial role of hobbyists in keeping bee industry buzzing

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The interactions between hobbyist and commercial beekeepers can enhance "honey value add," industry profits and knowledge around beekeeping in Western Australia.

That's the finding of a new study by Associate Professor Kirsten Martinus, a human geographer in the School of Social Sciences at The University of Western Australia, which explored the differences and similarities between hobbyist and commercial beekeepers and how their interplay influences the industry. The work is published in the journal *Geoforum*.

"Interestingly, both hobbyist and commercial beekeepers were found to be both competitors and collaborators, operating in different markets," Associate Professor Martinus said.

"While hobbyists mostly engage in bartering or not-for-profit exchanges, commercial beekeepers cater to the consumer sales market.

"Hobbyist beekeepers or 'hobbyist innovators' emerged as crucial contributors to various low-tech industries, serving as a wellspring of scientific, practical, and local geographic knowledge, which significantly influenced beekeeping industry approaches and activities in WA."

Interviews with 30 hobbyist, semi-commercial, and commercial beekeepers were conducted in 2017 and 2020 for the study.

Associate Professor Martinus said the "hobbyist innovator" model could lead to better understanding of how informal local community groups could spark innovation and even lead to industry transformation.

"The study highlighted the significance of informal 'non-firm actors' in the industry, with hobbyists found to play a vital role in the development and persistence of WA beekeeping culture and techniques through their entrepreneurial endeavors and various activities," she said.

To further nurture the thriving beekeeping community, the study recommended fostering collaborations between hobbyist beekeepers and

[local businesses](#) through supportive local and state government policies.

Associate Professor Martinus said the significant role of informal activities and hobbies in supporting industries were frequently overlooked in research.

"Passionate pursuits of hobbies have often played a pivotal role in shaping societies and industries throughout history," she said.

More information: Kirsten Martinus, 'It's a love interest'—Enthusiasts and regional industry cultures of practice, *Geoforum* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2023.103808](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2023.103808)

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