

Beekeeper interview questions

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What to expect

Beekeeper interviews usually combine a practical assessment with a structured conversation.

Employers want to see your hands-on skills, your understanding of colony health, and how you handle the seasonal pressures of the role.

- **Process:** Questions that ask you to walk through a routine task, such as a hive inspection or honey extraction, step by step.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about past experiences, like managing a disease outbreak or dealing with a difficult pollination contract.
- **Technical:** Questions that test your knowledge of bee biology, pest and disease management, or queen assessment.
- **Safety and compliance:** Questions about biosecurity, safe handling of hives, and record keeping.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations, such as arriving at a damaged apiary or dealing with unpredictable weather during a pollination contract.
- **Client-facing:** Questions about explaining pollination services or hive health to orchardists and other clients.

The interview typically starts with a phone or video screen covering your background and availability. If you progress, you will likely attend an in-person interview at an apiary, where you may be asked to demonstrate a hive inspection or discuss equipment. Some employers include a paid trial day to see how you work with bees. The final stage may involve meeting the owner or manager to discuss contracts and seasonal planning.

1. Walk me through how you inspect a hive from opening to closing it up.

Why they ask

This question checks your practical routine and whether you work methodically and safely.

How to structure your answer

A walk-through structure works best: start with preparation and safety gear, then move through opening the hive, inspecting frames, assessing brood and queen, checking for pests, and finally closing up. Mention what you look for at each step and how you record findings.

Example answer

"First, I put on my protective suit, light the smoker, and organise my tools so I am not fumbling once the hive is open. I approach from the side to avoid blocking the entrance, give a few puffs of smoke at the entrance and under the lid, then wait a moment. I lift the lid and place it upside down on the ground. I remove the first frame and set it aside, then work through the brood box, checking each frame for brood pattern, queen cells, and any signs of disease like American foulbrood or chalkbrood. I also look for small hive beetle and varroa mite. If I see the queen, I note her marking and behaviour. I might use a BroodMinder sensor to log temperature and humidity. After inspecting, I reassemble the hive, close it up, and record everything in HiveTracks or BeePlus before moving to the next hive."

2. Tell me about a time you had to manage a disease outbreak in your hives. What did you do and what was the outcome?

Why they ask

This question tests your problem-solving and your ability to act quickly to protect colony health.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation, the task you faced, the actions you took, and the result. Be specific about the disease, your treatment, and how you prevented spread.

Example answer

"A few seasons ago, I noticed unusual brood patterns in one apiary. I suspected American foulbrood, so I immediately isolated the affected hives and sent samples to the lab. While waiting for results, I disinfected my tools between hives and stopped moving equipment between apiaries. The lab confirmed American foulbrood in three hives. I euthanised those colonies, burned the frames and boxes, and notified the state apiary officer as required. I then monitored the remaining hives closely for several weeks. The outbreak was contained, and no other hives showed symptoms. I also updated my biosecurity plan to include stricter hygiene protocols and more frequent brood inspections."

3. How do you assess queen performance and decide when to requeen?

Why they ask

This question tests your understanding of colony dynamics and your ability to make management decisions.

How to structure your answer

A technical explanation structure: outline the signs of a good queen, the signs of a failing queen, and the factors you consider before requeening.

Example answer

"I assess queen performance by looking at the brood pattern. A good queen lays a solid pattern with few gaps, and the brood is at consistent stages. I also check for the presence of eggs, which means she has been laying recently. If I see a spotty brood pattern, drone cells in the worker brood, or the colony is building supersedure cells, that suggests the queen may be failing. I also consider the colony's temperament and productivity. If the queen is more than two seasons old or the colony is not building up as expected, I will requeen. I prefer to introduce a new mated queen from a reputable breeder, and I monitor acceptance over the following week."

4. What are your procedures for safe handling of hives and compliance with biosecurity regulations?

Why they ask

This question checks your awareness of safety and legal requirements, which is critical for a beekeeper.

How to structure your answer

Outline your safety gear, your hygiene practices, and your record keeping and reporting obligations.

Example answer

"For safety, I always wear a full protective suit, gloves, and boots. I use a smoker carefully, keeping it away from dry grass, and I carry a fire extinguisher in the vehicle. I lift hives with proper technique or use a trolley to avoid back strain. For biosecurity, I follow the state apiary code. I register my hives with the Department of Agriculture, keep records of all hive movements, and inspect for notifiable pests like varroa mite. I disinfect tools between apiaries and never feed honey from unknown sources. If I suspect a notifiable disease, I report it immediately to the apiary officer and follow their instructions."

5. You arrive at a pollination site and find the hives have been disturbed, with signs of vandalism or animal damage. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

This question tests your judgement under pressure and your ability to protect both the bees and the client's crop.

How to structure your answer

A judgement under pressure structure: assess the situation, prioritise safety, take action, and communicate with the client and authorities.

Example answer

"First, I would ensure my own safety by checking for any hazards like broken glass or angry bees. I would approach slowly and assess the damage from a distance. If hives are overturned, I would wait until dusk when the bees are calmer to set them upright. I would check for injured bees and damaged comb, and if the queen is lost, I would combine or requeen the affected colonies. I would document everything with photos and notes. Then I would contact the orchardist to explain what happened and discuss whether the remaining hives can still provide adequate pollination. If it looks like vandalism, I would report it to the police and the state apiary officer. Finally, I would review site security and consider moving hives to a safer location if needed."

6. How would you explain the importance of hive placement and timing to an orchardist who is new to pollination contracts?

Why they ask

This question tests your communication skills and your ability to educate clients on pollination best practices.

How to structure your answer

A client communication structure: start with empathy, explain the key factors, link them to the client's goals, and offer practical recommendations.

Example answer

"I would start by acknowledging that pollination can seem complex. Then I would explain that bees need time to settle and orient to a new site before they forage effectively, so placing hives in the orchard at least a few days before bloom starts is ideal. I would also explain that hive placement matters for wind protection and morning sun, which helps bees start foraging earlier. I would link this to the orchardist's goal of good fruit set, noting that well-timed and well-placed hives lead to more consistent pollination. Finally, I would offer to walk the orchard together to choose the best spots and agree on a schedule for hive delivery and removal."