

Board Member Profile: Bob Felker

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1943, Bob Felker moved frequently during his childhood as his father served during World War II and later worked in construction. The family eventually settled in California, where Bob graduated from Anaheim High School and attended several junior colleges in Orange County. After working for Thrifty Drugs and then Guild Drug, where he met and married his wife, Marilyn, Bob's life took a new direction when a farm catalog sparked his interest in beekeeping. The couple began building hives at their kitchen table, starting with 20 in the first year.

Their beekeeping business grew quickly with early pollination jobs in the Orange Cove area, hauling hives in a Toyota pickup and U-Haul trailer for just \$12 per hive. In the mid-1980s, Bob transferred with a sales job to Fresno, covering a territory from Visalia to Coalinga while expanding the bee business. By the late 1980s, they had grown to 2,000 hives, only to suffer a devastating loss in 1989 due to the first wave of mites. To save the ranch they had purchased in Kerman, Bob delivered The Fresno Bee for a decade, rising at 3 a.m. to make ends meet while continuing to rebuild his colonies.

As Bob's experience and reputation grew, so did demand for his bees in almond pollination, eventually leading him into brokering hives for other beekeepers as well. Managing pollination contracts became a year-round effort, requiring strong coordination, trust and logistics. Today, Bob maintains around 4,000 hives of his own and brokers an additional 18,000 hives each season. He takes pride in the relationships he has built with growers and fellow beekeepers, though he notes that ensuring the delivery of strong, healthy hives from other operations is one of the toughest parts of the job. His attention to quality and reliability has helped him build a respected name in California's pollination industry.

The Felkers have lived on their 40-acre ranch in Kerman for over 40 years, raising three daughters: Kimberly, Kelly and Kara. They have gone on to successful careers in pharmacy, architecture and nursing. Marilyn and he recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary, a milestone that reflects a life of commitment and teamwork.

Bob's service to the community spans decades, including roles on the Westside Mosquito Abatement District Board, the Kerman Planning Commission, the Kerman Christian School Board, and the Kerman Chamber of Commerce, where he previously served as a board member and now continues as an ambassador. He is a past president of both the local beekeeper club and the Kerman Rotary Club and has served on the Fresno County Farm Bureau Board of Directors since 2019. Now beginning to pass the torch to a new generation, Bob looks forward to traveling more, though his heart remains deeply rooted in the bees, the land and the community he calls home.