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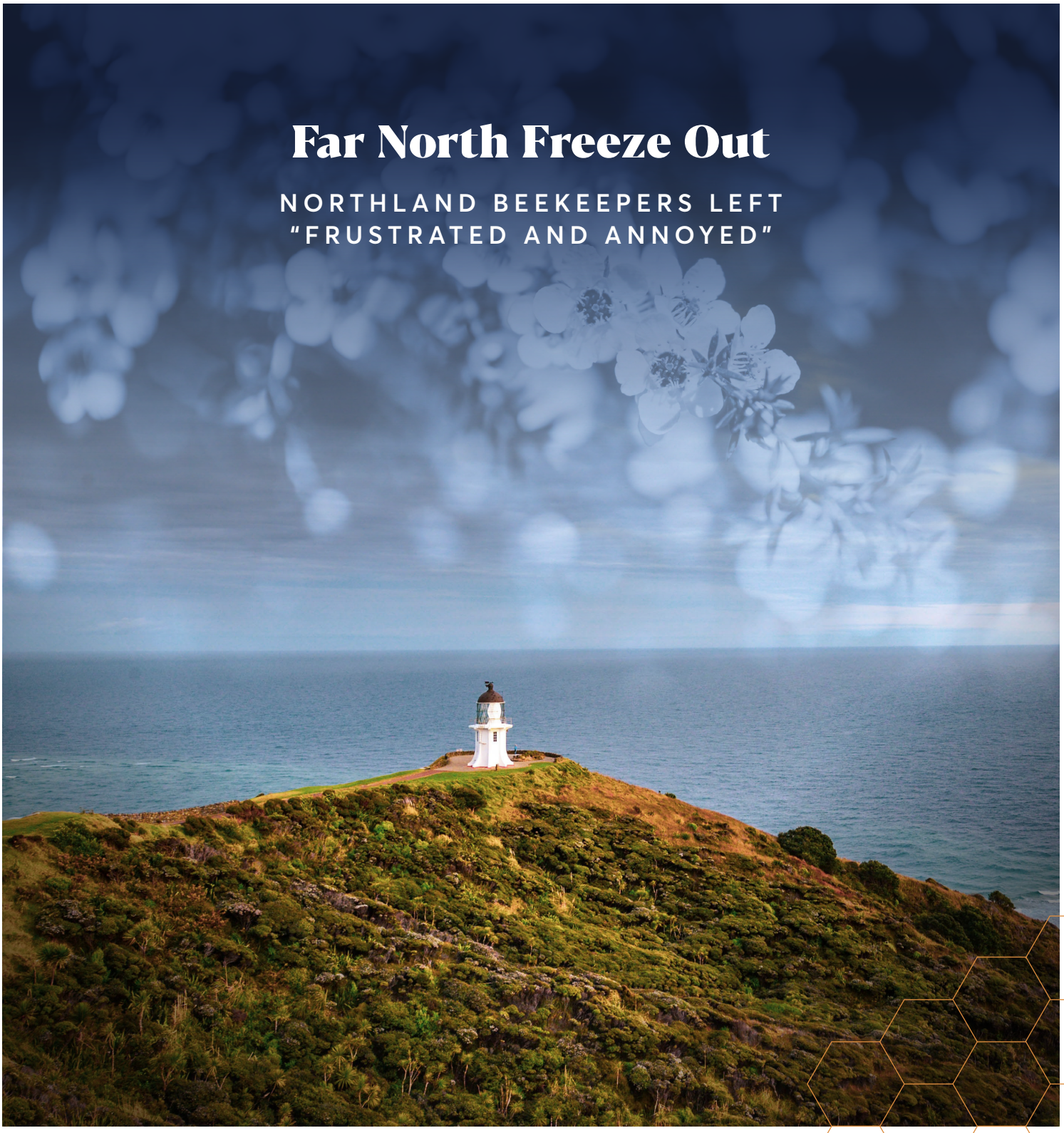
Apiarist's Advocate

News, Views & Promotions – for Beekeepers – by Beekeepers



Far North Freeze Out

NORTHLAND BEEKEEPERS LEFT "FRUSTRATED AND ANNOYED"

Far North Freeze Out

Since the Ministry for Primary Industries' (MPI) definition for manuka honey was established, a collection of Northland iwi and beekeepers have felt left out in the cold. Their once highly-valuable honey crops no longer make the manuka grade, putting businesses on the precipice of failure. Not willing to be the "collateral damage" of an "inadequate" manuka honey standard, they have organised a series of hui with MPI and industry bodies, for little progress and to feel unheard.

"Frustrated and annoyed" is how Tai Tokerau Miere spokesman Dr John Craig describes the mood of the most recent hui hosted by the collection of Northland iwi and honey producers on October 23.

Along with beekeepers and honey producers, the approximately 50 in attendance at Ngunguru marae north of Whangarei included representatives of MPI, Te Puni Kokiri (Ministry of Maori Development), industry bodies Apiculture New Zealand, New Zealand Beekeeping Inc, the Unique Manuka Factor Honey Association and the Manuka Honey Appellation Society.

The hui follows two others held earlier in the year, plus two meetings between Tai Tokerau Miere and the Minister for Agriculture, Damian O'Connor.

Dr John Craig

Despite these meetings, Craig says he feels his group is getting nowhere fast and that MPI is "stonewalling" their recommendations.

Tai Tokerau Miere has compiled statistics that only about half of the honey coming out of Northland which would be classified as manuka honey by MPI's science definition is making the grade under their regulatory definition. This is due to 2-methoxyacetophenone (2-MAP) levels which test below the required 5mg/kg standard, as defined by MPI in February 2018.

Craig, who is also the current honey manager for Northland iwi Ngati Hine and a retired Professor of Environmental Management at The University of Auckland, says the standard does not account for regional variations such as the low 2-MAP in Northland — but it should.

"One set of words we have heard from government officials is that we are just unfortunate collateral damage. That was put to MPI at the hui, that we are not prepared to accept that, in order to have an inadequate national standard, there has to be collateral damage and that we happen to be the worst of it."

Craig opened the hui with an address in which he moved that Tai Tokerau Miere, MPI, Apiculture New Zealand and New Zealand Beekeeping Inc all work together to appoint "a widely representative group of scientists to determine the best definition of manuka honey based on all available science". This was passed unanimously, with MPI and Te Puni Kokiri representatives abstaining. It will now be passed to Minister O'Connor for action.

The process is mooted to be given urgency — outlined to start within two months and to be completed within a maximum of six months. Any definition put forward by the "widely representative" group of scientist should be considered an interim definition, until the Manuka Honey Appellation Society makes recommendations down the line, it was proposed.

"If a group is put together by Tai Tokerau Miere, MPI and two beekeeping groups, that should be much more representative than if it is just put together by MPI," Craig says.

Despite MPI's standard being put in place to prevent honey fraud and protect the manuka honey product, Craig believes

it is having the opposite effect both in New Zealand and internationally.

Both 2-MAP and 3-phenyllactic acid (3-PLA), which are included in the current manuka honey definition, can be bought off the shelf cheaply and 3-PLA is found in various other honeys from around the world. Craig says this leads to easy adulteration.

"We are just helping the fraudsters, which we know goes on. Heaps of manuka honey is bottled overseas. It is a mess and we are not getting help from the government."

The former professor said he has heard from international scientists who do not think the current standard is credible.

"Many people think it is a joke because you can buy these chemicals on the shelf. They are incredibly cheap so anyone overseas can buy those things, mix them in and call it manuka. It is crazy."

The October hui also included an address from John Hill, the general manager of manuka honey and oil company New Zealand Manuka Group. Hill expressed reservations about the current standard and its failure to address regional variations in manuka honey chemical make-up. He presented an example of how one drum of monofloral manuka honey from the South Island could be mixed with nine drums of North Island clover and all 10 resulting drums would become monofloral manuka.

This sort of situation does not ensure consumer confidence, which was one of the aims of the MPI manuka honey program, Craig says. He put this to the two MPI representatives, deputy director general regulation Bryan Wilson and director of food science Dr Steve Hathaway, at Ngunguru marae.

"They said they have never heard of this and no one has ever given any evidence of doing that. As if beekeepers are going to explain how they can mix a whole heap of stuff which isn't manuka to make manuka. No one is going to do that, are they?" Craig posits.

The Tai Tokerau Miere spokesman says he first contacted MPI regarding the perceived flaws in the manuka honey definition over a year ago, and in that time there has been "very little talk and certainly no movement [in the standard]".

"MPI are just not buying it. It is crazy."

Meanwhile in the far north, where some believe what should be the most sought after manuka in the world is growing, many beekeepers continue to have their crops downgraded.

"They are all hurting desperately. Some made it very plain through general conversation that they are right on the edge of having to give up," Craig says, adding, "there will be a lot of Northland beekeepers who won't be around anymore if we have to keep waiting."

Co-op waiting, hoping, for funding

A potential honey producers co-op is waiting on a funding application to the Ministry for Primary Industries' Sustainable Food and Fibres Future grant.

A potential honey-producers cooperative hopes to take another step forward before the end of the year, having lodged an application for funding through the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI).

The Honey Producers Trust, backed by a collection of New Zealand beekeepers, lodged an application for a Sustainable Food and Fibres Future (SFFF) grant in early October.

The application process is expected to take a minimum of eight weeks.

The Trust hopes to secure almost $2 million to further their move towards forming a cooperative, which would be tasked with buying honey from its beekeeper shareholders and then on-selling. Up to $1.5 million is needed to undertake a feasibility study, with a further $500,000 earmarked for the establishment of the cooperative.

If the application is successful, MPI would likely require the Trust to raise a further $500,000 before any funds are released. The majority of those funds would likely be in the form of cash contributions from honey producers, Trust spokesman Bruce Clow says.

Should the Trust secure the required funding and the resulting feasibility study confirm a honey producers cooperative as viable, Clow believes it would be late next year, at the earliest, before any business is formed.

Over 170 beekeepers contributed to the initial call for funding, gathering about $83,000. This led to the formation of the Trust, which has called on the services of accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers and lawyers from Auckland firm Simpson-Grierson to guide the early stages on the cooperative movement.

The Trust initially planned to apply to the government's Provincial Growth Fund for backing, but this has been put aside in favour of the SFFF application, Clow says.

Orchard Model Could Bear Fruit for Beekeepers

For beekeepers struggling with the question of how to get greatest value for their honey, a recently established Bay of Plenty business could provide some answers. Manuka Orchard is a honey storage facility with a difference and its owner says by centralising honey stocks, specialising services and creating efficiencies, beekeepers can bear the fruit — higher prices for their honey.

Logan Bowyer has seen it work before. Having grown up on his family's Paengaroa kiwifruit orchard, he witnessed the drop in fruit prices of the late 1980s and the resulting effect on the industry. Smaller packing-sheds, such as that of his parents, were replaced by larger, more efficient pack-houses in an attempt to reduce cost of production.

"The pack-houses got bigger, cheaper staff were employed, graders got more efficient, the industry went to single desk selling and all of a sudden there was enough money in it to live again," says Bowyer, who, along with wife Tania, established Manuka Orchard in April this year.

With demand for non-manuka honeys having fallen, Bowyer believes now is the time for the honey industry to benefit from adopting similar practices to that of the kiwifruit trade, and streamlining operations.

"If we are going to be making lower-grade honey and the beekeeper wants and needs $6 a kilo, then the production guys have to get more efficient. One avenue where the value is won and lost at the moment is how cheaply you can get it into a pot."

AN ORCHARD OF BENEFITS

At Manuka Orchard Bowyer believes he can start the process. The business is young, but the model is one which he thinks the industry could replicate elsewhere, much like Fonterra has milk-treatment facilities up and down the country.

Manuka Orchard founders Logan and Tania Bowyer with children Chloe (7) and Joel (5).

Manuka Orchard's 800 square-metre shed has been developed from the Bowyer's kiwifruit pack-house, a site on which Logan Bowyer's grandfather first grew fruit. Now it stores honey, with a capacity of 1000 tonnes, and much of it manuka honey — hence the name Manuka Orchard.

There is more to the name than that though. Honey buyers are also able to approach Manuka Orchard and make offers to buy the honey stored there, much like someone would go to an orchard to purchase fruit varieties.

The old fruit pack-house had been leased by a commercial honey packer for 10 years, with Bowyer as manager for the last two. When they decided to move out, Bowyer launched Manuka Orchard in the premises.

"Tania and I looked at each other and said, 'we may as well carry on storing for smaller beekeepers', because we know how much money is won and lost in storage and we know how to do it properly," says Bowyer.

Since seeding the initial concept the business has added honey drying and small-batch creaming facilities, with an extraction line to come. Bowyer has a background in engineering, most recently through his Manuka Engineering business which streamlines honey processing facilities. Previous to that he specialised in chemical cleaning and engineering in food and pharmaceutical plants.

"Being an engineer and seeing the lost value of honey fermenting in storage, I decided to do something to resolve the issue. I designed and built a dryer that resembled the natural drying process of the bees. People were bringing their honey in with high moisture content and once it was here, it would stay here because we had the storage facility. That then led to the thought, well while it is here and not being sold, we may as well try and sell it."

CALLING ON BUYERS

Each week Bowyer sends out an email with the details of the honey Manuka Orchard has on site to a network of potential buyers. The contacts have been gained through seven years working in honey sheds around New Zealand and Australia, as well as attending national and international apiculture events.

Bowyer says he heard numerous beekeepers say they had phoned around their shortlist of potential honey buyers without getting a satisfactory response.

"So I thought, instead of multiple beekeepers doing that, what we should be doing is getting under a bit of an umbrella. Basically, my business is the employed sales and marketing team for the beekeepers who store with us and by way of paying for storage they get this service."

Bowyer doesn't promise to sell anyone's honey, but says the system is working and it offers more flexibility to the beekeeper than a co-operative has previously and would now.

"Last week we had offers of $16 a kilo to $65 for the same drum. That person told me that the top offer they had was $40 a kilo."

TIME TO SPECIALISE — FONTERRA-STYLE

The work done in the office may reap individual beekeepers better value for their honey, but out in the Manuka Orchard shed Bowyer sees his model of centralised honey storage and processing facilities as the way forward for the New Zealand honey industry more generally.

"There is no point trucking it all around the country, if we can extract it, store it and pack it in specialised places."

With specialised places come people with specialised skills, which would be another benefit of such plants he says.

"As an industry we need to set up Fonterra style extraction and storage facilities and possibly even packing facilities. The packers that I see packing are generally really good at marketing or people management, but have room to improve when it comes to storage, machinery management and production-line efficiencies.

"Most have started small and invested in expensive equipment which is underutilised with small production runs. They also struggle to find good hands on support locally as the machinery used is quite specialised. This gives them unplanned production issues and increases costs per pot to pack. Larger production runs at centralised facilities with good support networks has to be a better way forward."

For now though, Bowyer's focus is on his Bay of Plenty business and getting maximum value for Manuka Orchard's beekeeping clients, with the sales component an added bonus.

"Our driver is to be here for the beekeeper and to add value to the beekeeping platform as far as storage, machinery and expertise goes. At the end of the day, my core business is engineering and storage – but the more beekeepers we can pool under the umbrella of a centralised storage facility then the more honey we have in one place to help manage and grow the industry."

Getting the Optimal Mix

In month three of a series on management tools for the apiculture industry we branch away from a previous focus on managing beekeeping operations and step into the honey house. BLENDit, a software package from Teknovel, has the potential to save honey packers big bucks by assisting with the complex tasks of blending honey and selling internationally.

Optimisation is a word that Sunil Pinnamaneni often uses to describe the benefits of the BLENDit software which he has been instrumental in developing.

"It is amazing how much money you can save simply by finding the right drum," the Teknovel technical director says.

When you have a warehouse of hundreds, or even thousands, of drums of honey it can be difficult to manually identify the optimal choices for a blend, whereas BLENDit can do so in the click of a few buttons, Pinnamaneni says.

The software is designed to remove the potential for human error, save time and make sure the requisite parameters of a blend are met — all in the most cost-effective manner.

Pinnamaneni first saw the need for such a program while working for Manuka Health in 2017 when he witnessed a co-worker struggling to decide on a blend.

"He was taking an hour, two hours, to make one batch from spreadsheet calculations. If you do things manually you leave yourself open for mistakes through calculation errors by trying to combine two spreadsheets."

Pinnamaneni decided something was needed to reduce the time, risk and costs involved. So Manuka Health worked with data analytics and lab consumables supply company Teknovel to develop BLENDit, with Pinnamaneni eventually shifting over to Teknovel this year.

"It was a big project. We have spent a lot of time developing the basics. We had to start from scratch and develop the basic methodology using a statistical language program."

The time and effort was worth it though, with the finished software able to save honey houses considerably, he says.

"If you have to deal with a lot of parameters and you have a huge inventory, say 1000 drums, then the challenge is to find the information pertaining to six or seven drums, mix it and most importantly it has to be cost effective. You can't be using expensive drums to make a batch because you will be losing money."

King Honey, based in Taupo and running approximately 18,000 hives, has been an early adopter. Chief operating officer Chris Bowman says the benefits of the software have been noticeable.

"It is a hell of a good time saver and it has probably improved our bottom line by 15 percent by choosing us the most cost-effective drums.

"We tended to just want to get the batches selected and not worry too much about what they were costing. It came out the other end of the mixer and we were told, 'that batch cost you nearly 30 grand, but you could have done it for 20'. But we didn't have the time to be doing all the calculus required ourselves."

BLENDit does that calculating, and Pinnamaneni says that so long as the data going into the system, such as test results, are accurate, then BLENDit can navigate the complicated world of chemical markers and attributes for the user.

King Honey exports to 11 countries, so Bowman says a feature in BLENDit that allows him to pre-set the parameters of each market and then later select the market from

BLENDit

a dropdown list as required is helpful. Add to that its flexibility when proposing blends and Bowman says it makes for software he would recommend to any big operator.

"If you have a good drum inventory it gives you a huge choice of batches normally. You ask for MGO 100 or UMF five plus or whatever you are working to and it is flexible between the options it gives. So you are not locked in to a certain UMF number.

"I have never had it give me less than 10 options to form a batch. It is always searching and you can always go back in and tweak the parameters a wee bit and it will then give you another decision tree."

Pinnamaneni says BLENDit is very user-friendly with various dashboards viewable across a variety of devices, giving a good snapshot of inventory. This helps a manager see exactly what specification of honey is going to be required and what they have in stock — leading to better purchasing decisions, he says.

From optimising blends, ensuring honey is fit for its target market, reducing waste, saving time and improving purchasing decisions, the benefits of BLENDit are varied according to Teknovel's technical director. Despite the wide-ranging benefits, the core role of the product is a simple one though, he says.

"The program is not magic, it is just a computer, but it stops you having to find the drums and instead it finds the optimal drums for you."

A Bee-Utiful Solution

A simple trip to a garden centre a few months ago has led two primary school students on a quest to improve knowledge around bee-friendly plantings. Now, having had success locally, they hope to take their Bee-Utiful NZ project nationwide, encouraging others to follow in their footsteps.

It started with a wish to buy more bee-friendly plants for the garden at Whareorino School, a rural 10-pupil primary school in the Waitomo district.

"We went to a few stores and noticed there were not many plants or seeds that were labelled bee-friendly," explains Indi Single, who, along with school-mate Zac Littin, founded the Bee-Utiful NZ movement in August.

As part of their school science fair project, Indi and Zac, aged 11 and 12 respectively, undertook a literature search and conducted some research of their own regarding consumer buying behaviours to bee-friendly plants and seeds. They found that over 90 percent of consumers like to buy plants and seeds favourable to bees, but there is generally a lack of information available at stores to guide such choices.

This led the pair to approach retailers and seed suppliers and they were encouraged by manufacturers and stores' openness to consider their ideas around greater promotion of bee-friendly plants. They designed a poster which has written information on the plight of honey bees, garden-management tips to encourage bees and also a QR-code which can be scanned with a smart-phone to view a video they made.

Indi and Zac say they wanted to make the poster appeal to children. Indi's father and Whareorino School teacher, Ben Single, explains the thinking behind the poster the students titled "Bee A Detective".

"Kids have a big influence on adults. Zac and Indi have designed their poster to be fun. It has a little video and Indi says she wants the kids to go into stores and say 'let's be a detective!' and drag their parents around the store to find bee-friendly plants."

The posters are up in numerous stores in Taranaki and Waikato, but they haven't stopped there.

Zac and Indi have successfully lobbied several plant and seed suppliers to improve labelling so consumers can more readily identify which products provide bee forage.

Both posters and labels were made in consultation with beekeeping industry groups New Zealand Beekeeping Incorporated (NZBI) and Apiculture New Zealand and the pair attended a field day, hosted by NZBI in September, where they presented their poster.

Indi Single and Zac Littin present their bee education poster for display at a Mitre 10 store.

It was sometimes difficult to get an audience with the correct person at various stores or suppliers, Indi says. However, they have persisted and earned encouraging results.

"The stores are really excited. They have thought it was a good idea. It has been positive," she says.

Zac has also convinced his father to plant a small amount of manuka trees on their farm and he says they are looking into getting a hive for their school.

"We have been talking to the other kids and they are quite interested as well," Zac says.

Now he and Indi want to spread the Bee-Utiful NZ word even wider, to other kids and schools and get them to approach retailers in their community. It is prohibitive for their small rural school to mass produce their poster, but other schools could print one or two copies and students should find it easier to make contact with the appropriate person in their local stores, they say.

Both Zac and Indi say it makes them feel "proud" when they see their posters up in stores and so they would like kids all over New Zealand to replicate what they have achieved, with Indi adding some forthright words of encouragement.

"We are only a 10-kid school in the middle of nowhere and look what we have done."

More information on Indi and Zacs' Bee-Utiful NZ movement, including a copy of the Bee A Detective poster, can be found on their facebook page, @BeeUtifulNZ, or by emailing beeutifulnz@gmail.com.

Steph Munro of Munro Honey Co accepts her Environment Southland Community Award from ILT's Alan Dennis

Beekeeper Wins Environment Award

Boutique Southland honey producer Munro Honey Co, owned and operated by Steph Munro, were rewarded for their commitment to environmental practices recently.

At an awards evening in Invercargill on October 8, Munro Honey Co scooped the Environment Southland Community Award for Environmental Sustainability in Business, one of 10 categories recognised.

Munro sells honey locally and online, produced from her 30 hives, which she plans to grow to 60 in the current season. All the hiveware used is wooden and the honey is sustainably packaged.

"Every part of our process we think about the environment. Right from the choices we make inside the beehive to how we extract it and how we package it," Munro explains.

"We package in glass jars, then label it and it gets wrapped in an eco-wrap, as opposed to bubble wrap, so it's a compostable, recyclable wrap and then that goes into a cardboard box. That then gets put into a plant-based courier bag which can be composted in your home compost. Even the address labels are made of sugarcane."

Having left her fulltime job to concentrate on beekeeping, Munro is looking to expand her honey company, with the environmental principles guiding it in mind.

"In the coming years we want to expand our business to a few hundred hives. We would like to establish a local bee-garden, expand our product range to include natural honey comb … and we also want to establish a swap a jar system.

"Watch this space."

Comb-Honey Kit Prize Winner

Despite not being a beekeeper, the winner of a comb honey pack awarded in an *Apiarist's Advocate* October giveaway, will be put to prompt use by the lucky recipient.

Jeanna Rodgers of Lumsden in Northern Southland shared and tagged an *Apiarist's Advocate*'s October Facebook post then had her name drawn to be rewarded with a 10 frame round honey comb kit from Ceracell Beekeeping Supplies.

The relief-teacher and mother of four says she has several friends who are hobbyist beekeepers so they will benefit from the prize, and she hopes she will benefit in the form of honey comb in return.

"We eat loads of honey and I have always thought it would be really cool to try a bit more beekeeping myself. At the moment we just eat the stuff though," Rodgers says.

She has not eaten comb honey since her childhood and says she can distinctly remember having to contend with bits of wax.

Rodgers tagged several friends in the Facebook post who she knew would enjoy the read as they are hobbyist beekeepers.

"We don't see the bees around that we used to. I don't know if New Zealand is having a problem, but we certainly don't see a lot around. So the more I can help in encouraging friends who are beekeeping the better.

"The prize certainly won't be sitting around in the cupboard."

Jeanna Rodgers with her new comb-honey kit courtesy of Ceracell Beekeeping Supplies and Apiarist's Advocate.

Practical Beekeeping in New Zealand (5th Ed.)

The Definitive Guide
ANDREW MATHESON & MURRAY REID

An extract from Chapter 9: *Swarms and Swarm Prevention.*

SWARMING AND THE BEEKEEPER

In the days of beekeeping with fixedcomb hives such as box hives and skeps, swarming was welcomed as a way of obtaining colonies, to replace any that had died or been killed at the previous honey harvest, or to increase colony numbers. The swarming season was the highlight of the beekeeping year, as beekeepers hurriedly caught and hived swarms.

Under a modern system of beekeeping, swarming is extremely undesirable. It greatly reduces a hive's honey production or pollinating ability, often to the point of making the hive uneconomic by reducing income to below the cost of inputs (such as feeding and mite control). Absconding swarms from varroa-infested colonies spread the mite. When a colony swarms there is a break in brood rearing while the colony does not have a mated, laying queen, which causes a break in worker emergence three weeks later, and a break in forager recruitment three weeks after that. During swarming, the queen with her particular genetic characteristics is lost, and there is a risk that the hive will become queenless if an accident kills the replacement queen (for instance during a mating flight). The whole swarming process occupies a colony for at least a month. Preparations for queen rearing begin two to four weeks before the first swarm emerges, and developing queens are sealed before swarming takes place. About a week before swarming, the old queen's egg-laying rate drops so that she loses enough bulk to be able to fly from the hive. A few days before the first swarm leaves, workers become quieter and much of the flying from the hive is concerned with scouting for nest sites. A few hours before swarming, the colony becomes completely chaotic as final preparations are made. All these activities mean that even if a swarm is captured and reunited with the parent colony, honey production will be less than for a similar hive that has not swarmed.

A beekeeper undertakes a 10 second swarm cell check.

SWARM PREVENTION

It is far better beekeeping to prevent swarming preparations from being made, than to try and stop a swarm from leaving the hive. However, swarm-prevention techniques must be compatible with profitable colony management. As an eminent early twentieth-century American beekeeper, C. C. Miller, wrote in his book Fifty Years Among the Bees: 'If a colony disposed to swarm should be blown up with dynamite, it would probably not swarm again, but its usefulness as a honey-gathering institution would be somewhat impaired.' The beekeeping literature contains many descriptions of management systems designed to control swarming, most of which are very complicated. A good swarm-prevention method should reduce swarming with as little interference to the colony as possible. Some of the better swarm-prevention measures are described below …

Read more in the full version of Practical Beekeeping in New Zealand, available from Exisle Publishing.

When Beekeepers and Bureaucrats Meet

Our lead story this month centres on concerns the Tai Tokerau Miere collective of Northland iwi have with MPI's regulatory definition of manuka honey. The Northland producers are far from the only beekeepers in the country to take umbrage at the new standards and I am not going to tackle the failings of it here and now.

However, what our lead story, along with our update on a potential honey producers cooperative, does highlight is a broader disconnect between MPI and private industry.

John Craig of Tai Tokerau Miere has taken up the fight against the current regulatory standard since it was introduced early last year, approaching MPI and the Minister for Agriculture, Damian O'Connor, directly. The retired professor claims to have written to MPI, met with the Minister twice and his collective has held three huis bringing the industry and MPI together, all for naught or close to it.

It is not surprising that Craig described the mood at the latest hui as "frustrated and annoyed". Ever argued with someone only to have them ignore you? Imagine doing that with your livelihood on the line.

For many beekeepers and business owners who come from a background of private industry, trying to weave a path through the maze of bureaucratic process is a thing of nightmares.

To provide them some direction through the maze, the Honey Producers Trust has employed the services of paid professionals as they seek to gain funding to explore the feasibility of forming a co-op. So far the services have cost them much of their initial $83,000 raised and, even still, frustrations with MPI and their processes are starting to show.

Initial enquiries into the possibility of gaining financial support from the Provincial Growth Fund have been shelved by the Trust, with the Sustainable Food and Fibres Future (SFFF) grant now the target. If a favourable outcome does not eventuate — and it is far from a guarantee — then it will leave more beekeepers frustrated and out of pocket.

As spring turns to summer beekeeping businesses kick into a higher gear, but between Tai Tokerau Miere and the Honey Producers Trust, many are left waiting on the slow moving cogs of the MPI machine to get the answers they need.

Letters to the Editor

We welcome your feedback. Address a letter to *editor@apiadvocate.co.nz* and share your opinion, or offer a news tip if you think there is something which should be covered.

DIASTASE DRAMAS

Dear Editor,

A friend sent me a copy of your publication. While I think all of us agree that honey fraud is a serious issue and needs to be fought wherever possible, it seems that the method used and promoted at the Apimondia (at least so far) is not really fit for global application *(Editor's note: this issue was covered in the October Apiarist's Advocate)* - it may become better if the sample base is truly wide enough for all regions of the world and if the parameters are modified to accept that European standards may not be the right ones for tropical and other 'unusual' sources.

Particularly, diastase seems to be a questionable issue even prior to NRM testing. Last year I had two tropical honeys tested, and they came back with a diastase reading of 2 and 4.3 respectively, i.e. failed.

The UK lab who did the tests suggested to have the honeys re-tested at their sister lab in Germany, since they use a different testing method for diastase (I was told there are three accepted tests for this particular parameter).

The honey that had been tested at 4.3 came back with 2 and the honey that had tested with 2 came back with 11.8.

Therefore, the results of the same sample in one case were half, in the other six times the original results.

What is the point of testing if there are such discrepancies? What purpose (apart from running up a lab test) is served in such circumstances?

Best wishes
Dr Martin Kunz
Diversity Honey, London, UK.

P.S. For transparencies sake: The samples I had tested were from apis cerana (Asiatic honey bee) - and none of the labs were able to tell me (what I found in a book by Eva Crane) that apis cerana naturally has a lower diastase activity compared to apis mellifera (the Western honey bee). This just shows that 'European' biased standards need to become more inclusive.

A KEEN HELPING HAND

Hello Editor,

I am writing to you from an Autumnal Ireland – greetings.

It is about 23 years since I first visited your beautiful country, spending three weeks in New Zealand on my way to Australia. It was the one and only time I was in your part of the world, but after years of slaving and saving for my ticket to paradise it is time to return to NZ.

It will be great to trade the oilskin jacket and trousers, which you need here at this time of year, and put on my shorts and t-shirt instead.

While I am holidaying in NZ, it seems to me like a good idea to learn a bit about a hobby I have recently embarked upon — beekeeping. I have read a couple of books but as yet, I have no hives of my own.

Our beekeeping season in Ireland is well over and I hope to get a couple of hives next Spring. Before I buy any hives, I really would like to get some hands-on experience while I travel though.

I have written to quite a few commercial beekeepers in New Zealand, asking if they would be interested in giving me some work experience. However, to my disappointment, I have had no replies.

I am thinking about 3 or 4 weeks, at no cost to the beekeeper. I can even stay in a local backpackers if accommodation is not possible.

In essence I'm looking for a kind of WWOOFing experience, but not like fruit-picking or farming animals, just beekeeping!

My travel dates are: arriving in mid-November 2019 and leaving at the end of Jan 2020.

I'm happy to learn about beekeeping in both South and North islands!

Perhaps you might know some friends, family or colleagues in your network who might need a pair of helping hands? And, if not, maybe you can point me in the right direction please?

Thanks in advance!
Yours in beekeeping, Kia Ora,
Anthony Morgan, Dublin, Ireland.
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Editorial

Editor: Patrick

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Advertising

For more information or to make a booking, email **advertising@apiadvocate.co.nz** or phone **Patrick 027 383 7278** or **Laura 021 130 7446**.

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