

ISSUE 10, MAY 2020

APIARIST'S ADVOCATE



News, Views & Promotions - for Beekeepers - by Beekeepers



**Bee Flights
Grounded**
Apiculture not Immune
from Covid-19

Bee Flights Grounded



The impact of Covid-19 has been far reaching, but apiculture, especially in New Zealand, has been less affected than many industries. That is not the case for the select few beekeepers who send package bees to Canada each autumn though. Cancelled flights mean they have been able to send only a fraction of the packages that Canadian beekeepers have sought, leaving the Kiwi beekeepers out of pocket and their North American counterparts severely set back.

For 32 years Russell Berry has always delivered on his export bee orders, but not this year.

Arataki Honey, owned and managed by Berry, usually sends more than 10,000 packages of bees to Canada in autumn, in time for Canadian beekeepers to make up for losses following their harsh winters.

Arataki have faced challenges in the past, but always delivered, says a disappointed Berry.

"We have always managed to find a way around it.

"We used to put men in Hawaii, men in Los Angeles, to supervise transfers. I have been with the bees myself through Scotland and all sorts of things. We do go the extra mile to ensure they get there safely."

A lack of international tourism means the Air New Zealand flights which would usually carry their pallet loads of packages from Auckland to Vancouver direct, have mostly been cancelled with no suitable alternate routes available.

Compounding the problem is a lack of communication from Air New Zealand. On one occasion the national carrier did not respond to emails or calls from Berry's agent for a week, he was told.

"It's been extremely disruptive and there has been extremely bad communication between government, airlines and agents," says the Arataki Honey owner.



One of the few pallets of package bees that Kintail Honey has been able to export to Canada this season.



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"It is impossible, because an airline might decide it has a plane going somewhere in a couple of days, but no one can meet their requirements. It is too late. They haven't informed anybody early enough. It has been a right shambles to put it mildly."

Arataki would send 17 pallet loads of package bees to Canadian beekeepers in a usual season, between March and May, whereas this year they have only been able to secure flights for four, all in March.

Fellow North Island beekeepers Kintail Honey, who along with Arataki export the vast majority of New Zealand's bees to Canada, have suffered a similar fate, says owner-operator James Ward.

"We have been able to get very few pallets out. We got some out at the beginning of the lockdown when they were doing repatriation flights and that is about the long and short of it," Ward says.

Kintail Honey will be lucky to cover their package bee expenses this season Ward says, while Berry describes the economic impacts as "really serious stuff", for not only Arataki but also the select group of beekeepers who they buy some of their packages from.

Arataki Honey have been able to make up some of the loss of income by getting large shipments of mated queen bees onto flights at late notice, but it is a great reduction on what package bee sales would normally bring in, Berry says.

They were able to supply a total of 5824 mated queens to Canada, on two flights, during one week in April. To Berry's knowledge, they are the two largest exports of live bees ever out of New Zealand.

Mated queens will be of assistance to Canadian beekeepers desperately needing to make up for winter losses, but the lack of package bees will have a dramatic impact on Canadian beekeeping this season. That will be felt further along the food chain too, Berry believes.

"It will impact their ability to produce honey, but the number one thing is an inability to pollinate crops. If you have 10,000 or 12,000 hives, they would pollinate about 6000 hectares of crop. That is a lot of food."

Canada is the world's largest producer of canola oil, a more than 25 billion dollar industry for the North American nation, which has a heavy reliance on honey bees for pollination.

The impact of Covid-19 on both Kiwi package bee suppliers and their Canadian customers may not be limited to this season, Ward worries.

"What scares me is looking further ahead. Unless we get tourism up and running and Air New Zealand flights going, there will be tough competition for space from all types of exporters," the Kintail Honey owner says.

"It is flights for next year that I am now concerned about." 🐝



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Concerns over Levy Order “Duck-Shoved”



Industry bodies are at loggerheads over concerns raised regarding the wording of an amendment order which sets changes to the annual American Foulbrood (AFB) levy in place. Since raising their concerns, New Zealand Beekeeping Incorporated (NZBI) claim to have been “duck-shoved” between fellow beekeeper-representative body Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ), the Management Agency National AFB Pest Management Plan (the Management Agency) and the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). Not content with the limited responses received so far, they continue to seek clarification.

NZBI's concern is with the wording in Schedule 1 of the Amendment Order, brought into being in March, as part of the change over from an apiary-based AFB levy system to a hive-based system. That amendment sets the change to a hive-based levy in motion for “levy year ending 31 May 2020”.

NZBI president Jane Lorimer says it appears beekeepers will be charged for that levy year twice, having paid a 2019-20 levy this time last year.

“In a time like now with low honey prices, and the Covid-19 lockdown, beekeepers are feeling the pinch. Many will struggle to pay the levy invoice and will certainly not want to pay for one levy year twice,” Lorimer says.

Invoices issued to beekeepers by the Management Agency in April do not state the year to which the levy relates.

Invoices issued in April 2019 detailed “AFB Beekeeper Levy 2019-20 year” and the year prior they were even more detailed, stating “2018-19 year (year from 1st June 2018 to 31st May 2019)”. Despite the omission of such detailed dates in 2020, Management Agency national compliance manager Clifton King says the invoices have all the relevant information.

“I didn't notice it listed the levy year in previous invoices,” King says.

“It is not on this year because it is not relevant. The two things that are relevant are the date that generate the levy liability and the date the levy needs to be paid by. Both of those two things are clearly described on the levy invoice and the noise about the levy year is, quite frankly, a red herring.”

The levy liability date is March 31 each year and payments are due by June 1.

The Management Agency then spends the funding received between June 1 and May 31, and despite an increase in the levy and a move from apiary to hive-based levy system, that spending pattern will not change, King says.

“What NZ Beekeeping Inc is trying to argue is that beekeepers have already paid the levy for that year and you shouldn't have to pay it again, but what they are not saying is that if that happens we will not have any funds to operate the Pest Management Plan for the next financial year.

“It completely overlooks the key date. The key date is March 31. That is the date that the levy falls due. 31 March 2020 is a whole year different to 31 March 2019. In terms of the funding which we receive, based on apiaries as at 31 March 2019, we will have spent that funding by 31 May 2020,” King says.

MPI has assured King that the wording in the levy order – where 2019-20 is listed as the year which changes to the levy are to take place – is correct and they have given him a “technical explanation”.

A request from *Apiarist's Advocate* to MPI for further explanation on the details of the Order was responded to by a spokesperson offering limited specifics regarding the levy period, but saying the Ministry stand by the Order.

“The levy has had some adjustments that take effect from this year, notably in the rate and the way it is calculated,” the spokesperson says.



Schedule 1 Transitional, savings, and related provisions

cl 3A

Schedule 1: inserted, on 16 April 2020, by clause 15 of the Biosecurity (American Foulbrood—Beekeeper Levy) Amendment Order 2020 (LI 2020/43).

Part 1 Provisions relating to Biosecurity (American Foulbrood—Beekeeper Levy) Amendment Order 2020

Schedule 1 Part 1: inserted, on 16 April 2020, by clause 15 of the Biosecurity (American Foulbrood—Beekeeper Levy) Amendment Order 2020 (LI 2020/43).

1 Levy rate for levy year ending on 31 May 2020

- (1) The rate of levy for the levy year ending on 31 May 2020 is—
- \$40 per beekeeper for the base levy; plus
 - \$1.35 per bee colony for the colony levy.
- (2) The rate of levy fixed by this clause applies instead of any rate fixed for the same levy year before this clause came into force.

Schedule 1 clause 1: inserted, on 16 April 2020, by clause 15 of the Biosecurity (American Foulbrood—Beekeeper Levy) Amendment Order 2020 (LI 2020/43).

"While some of the wording in the levy order has been updated, there is no change to the dates that the levy is assessed and calculated (31 March), issued (at least 28 days before the due date), and due (1 June).

"To switch across to the new process, there are some transitional provisions that apply to the next levy due on 1 June."

The spokesperson did not elaborate on what the "transitional provisions" referred to were.

Lorimer says NZBI is in contact with MPI, having not received sufficient explanations from ApiNZ or the Management Agency.

"MPI is at least attempting to give us some answers, but in so doing creates more questions," Lorimer says.

ApiNZ chief executive Karin Kos, whose organisation oversees the Management Agency, says she does not want to see the goal of eliminating AFB from hives put at risk over the current controversy and she urges beekeepers to meet their levy responsibilities.

"It is extremely disappointing to see communications circulating within industry questioning the validity of this year's invoice based on an alleged technicality," Kos says.

"ApiNZ is always open to fair debate and being held to account, however we question any action that could jeopardise the good

*The Amendment Order which has been questioned
by New Zealand Beekeeping Incorporated.*

progress being made with AFB and may result in hitting all beekeepers in the back pocket."

However, Lorimer says NZBI are still working to get to the bottom of their concerns.

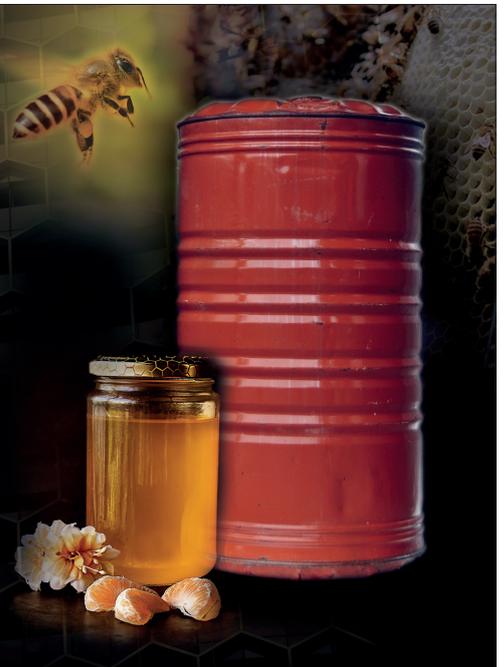
"NZ Beekeeping Inc wants beekeepers to be treated fairly and given some straight answers. If errors have been made, we want them rectified. If it is correct, then we want beekeepers given an explanation in plain English. No more, no less," Lorimer adds. 🐝

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Lockdown Limitations



Deemed an essential industry, beekeepers have been permitted to operate throughout New Zealand's various forms of Covid-19 lockdown, but that does not mean business as usual. As with other industries, beekeepers have a strict set of protocols to meet to gain exemption. So, what has operating through a lockdown looked like and what impacts has it had on beekeeping operations? We check in with a selection of beekeeping employers from around the country.

Getting the exemption to operate was crucial for beekeepers, with Tweeddale's Honey owner Don Tweeddale especially glad.

"It has been wonderful to be accepted as essential, because without that we would have a lot of honey still on the hives and the honey would have been crystalized and not been able to be extracted. A third of our income could have gone if we did not get the exemption to work," Tweeddale says.

Even with the exemption, some businesses have suffered major loses in revenue though such as to the package bee industry (detailed in *Bee Flights Grounded*, on page 2), and indirect disruptions to trading.

The Beekeepers Honey, an approximately 3000 hive operation in Canterbury, lost a honey sale when the contract extraction facility they had planned to use shut its doors as a precaution against Covid-19.



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"The sales that we had, we haven't been able to get the honey out and that means cancelled orders," says Susan Gill, owner of The Beekeepers Honey.

"It is hard to find a buyer anyway, so to then not be able to supply once you do, it has really been quite devastating and demoralising. I get it, we have got to stay safe, but for our business it has really affected our cash flow and it is difficult."

Regardless of such losses of revenue within the industry, hives have had to be maintained. So, beekeepers have continued to work all over the country, despite some initial apprehensions as to the practicalities of meeting safe operating practices.

"At first it was quite daunting, because you think, where do I start?" Gill says of manging their beekeepers.

"Once we started reading through it though, we found it wasn't as hard as initially thought."

At Kintail Honey, Jason Ward, who oversees four North Island bases of operation, also had some concerns in the early stages of their lockdown planning.

"The challenge at the very start was, where you get the information from and how you filter the useful from the over the top," Ward says.

Because they received conflicting information from the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and the Ministry for Health, at Kintail they decided to follow the Ministry for Health's protocols and have since passed an MPI audit.

Many of the practices advised have been taken up by most beekeeping businesses with staff, such as increased emphasis on handwashing, limitations on how many people can ride in a vehicle, and regular sanitising of high-touch areas. Whereas other precautions seem to have been implemented by fewer workplaces, such as regular testing of staff temperatures at Arataki Honey and the keeping of detailed log books for vehicle stoppages by The Beekeepers Honey staff.

Honey was still being extracted at Tweeddale's Honey in March and the extraction shed was still able to get the job done through lockdown, with a few extra precautions.

"Our extraction staff had to be spread out a bit further than they usually would be, just to get that two metres apart," Tweeddale says.

"Sometimes that was difficult, because with certain machinery you can't separate operators that much. Everyone wears a mask and gloves though and when it comes to break times everyone spreads out and are at least five or six metres apart."

The importance of such physical separation is heightened for those more than 70 years of age, with recommendations the elder isolate at home. However, at Arataki Honey owners Russell and Annette Berry fall into that category.

"We run this business, but we are not meant to be at work," Russell Berry says.

In order to take their place at the company they have taken added precautions, the Arataki Honey owner says.

"We locked ourselves in our office and on our office doors there is a big no-entry sign, and we only live 50 metres away.

"I take it very seriously that we are an essential business and we have to do what we have to do. That is, send package bees to Canada, send honey to the shops, and keep the New Zealand people fed."

That position in the food supply chain has been filled by apiculturists not just because they have been deemed an essential industry, but because they are also implementing the protocols required. Several employers are praising their staff for successfully undertaking all the required changes.

For Ward, who worked as a registered nurse prior to beekeeping, it has been heartening to see the reaction of the Kintail Honey staff to the protocols.

"We couldn't have done it without the guys buying into it," says Ward.

"As someone with a medical background, seeing people with a non-medical background buy into the whole thing, the social distancing, the hygiene, it was quiet amazing to see. The guys have been incredible. They have been so receptive." 🐝



Appropriate signage and equipment, relating to safe Covid-19 operating procedures, such as this at Kintail Honey has been common place at beekeeping premises in recent months.

JT's Journey Far From Over



When a beekeeper slides back their veil in New Zealand, it is not unusual to see a Filipino face. However Jonathan Tiangco's journey from the Philippines to our shores, and now to the role of head beekeeper for Oha Honey's Wairarapa-Hawke's Bay operations, is unique and not without sacrifice.

"A lot of Filipinos are so reserved and cannot adapt to the culture very quickly. They are a bit shy," Tiangco explains of his countrymen.

"All of us understand English, because we have been colonised by Americans, but the issue is, some are shy to make a mistake in the English language. Not me. I guess I have a strong personality and have always loved talking to people."

That outgoing nature has seen the 45-year-old excel, not only as a beekeeper, but also in management roles since arriving in New Zealand 10 years ago. Getting to this point in the industry has not been easy though, and began with a leap of faith.

GETTING A START

"Prior to coming over here we were living stable," Tiangco says of his life on the Philippines island of Luzon in 2011.

He was 36, a husband, father of six children aged from one to 10 as well as a home owner and owner of a business selling rice wholesale and retail.

"But it always fascinated me to work overseas and beekeeping fascinated me because they are beautiful animals," he recalls.

After undertaking two seasons of part-time beekeeping work in the Philippines, apiculture study through the University of the Philippines and an extra training course to sharpen his skills, a friend working in New Zealand recommended Tiangco for a role at Tweeddale's Honey in Taihape.

While the role was the sort of opportunity he was looking for, it meant

*Jonathan Tiangco,
Oha Honey head
beekeeper Wairarapa-
Hawke's Bay.*

leaving behind his young family for months on end as he worked through the Kiwi spring and summer. As many Filipino beekeepers had done prior and since, Tiangco grasped the opportunity, leaving other family members to take care of his business interests back home while he dived into Kiwi beekeeping with Tweeddale's.

CLIMBING THE LADDER

After three years of travel to and from the Philippines, juggling a new career and a large family, Tiangco made the bold decision to move his wife and all six children to New Zealand.

They settled in Blenheim, with Tiangco moving into a junior beekeeping role with Taylor Pass Honey Company. Despite the new job at a new company, his remuneration was still reflective of a junior position, while his family was going through the challenge of adapting to a foreign country.

"[That time] was so hard. It was a struggle," Tiangco explains.

"It was a very different culture for us and a big struggle. My wife didn't have a job when she first arrived and I was only on 21 dollars-an-hour at the time, with six kids. Imagine? Renting. That was very difficult."

But in the end the sacrifice paid off, with Tiangco quickly gaining promotion in a booming honey industry.

"It has worked out well. I am a goal-oriented person. I set up goals and I have reached goals. For instance, when I was at Taylor Pass Honey Company I said, 'I want to be a team leader'. After a season, I was a team leader. Then, a couple of seasons later, I was hired as an apiary manager at a small company."



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That company was Manuka Mountain Gold in the Wairarapa, meaning a move across the strait to Masterton for the family, and an opportunity for Tiangco to take charge of the company's 800 hives in his sixth season in this country.

ANOTHER STEP UP

After three seasons further honing both beekeeping and management skills, including introducing his eldest son to the joys of beekeeping as an "unpaid apprentice", Tiangco moved from his role with few staff to his current position at the head of a team of 21.

"It's very challenging and so different," he says.

"As a team leader it was only three of us and now it is 21 people. You certainly need people skills and it can be a bit tough. It has been one season though now and I am getting the hang of it."

As well as calling on his beekeeping training and experience, the role has meant drawing on skills he learned in the Philippines, people management through his rice business and administration acumen gained through a Bachelor's degree in Science and Customs Administration from the Philippine Maritime Institute.

While the role at Oha Honey is challenging it still allows Tiangco and family time to return to their homeland in the northern summer months, but not necessarily for a holiday.

BACK AND FORWARD

The Philippines is the eighth-largest rice-producing nation in the world and Tiangco still maintains his small part in that chain,

with ownership of the operation he managed full-time prior to his beekeeping career. Along with the rice trading, last year he formed a second business, this time looking to expand on his current career path with a training course for Filipino beekeepers.

"I started the business last year, and this season would have been my first one, but because of Covid I cannot get back to the Philippines."

The travel restrictions have not only limited his access to managing business ventures, but have also meant he will not get to visit his two eldest children, who have returned to the Philippines to study. Adding to that disappointment, Tiangco was set to meet his first grandchild.

That day will come though, as he expects to make the journey between New Zealand and the Philippines regularly in the future. The beekeeper also has a desire to gain New Zealand residency, but that is one goal which has eluded him to this point.

"If you flourish on one side of your life, maybe another side will not. I have flourished with my beekeeping, but I am not a resident," he says.

An application in 2015 failed on a technicality and he hopes to have the time and resources to make another application in the future.

"I love New Zealand and have adapted to the culture and you have the most amazing people," he says of the country which has fostered his beekeeping career.

"There are times where I reminisce on the hardships and the good times, the learning processes I have had to go through. Those experiences moulded me and made me who I am today.

"I am very happy," he says, before chuckling, "what a journey". 🐝



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A Much Needed Catch Up



After months of social-distancing, beekeepers will be itching to catch up, Maggie James believes. So, along with some fellow Canterbury apiarists, the vastly-experienced queen-breeder is planning a field day to provide the appropriate occasion. The event, on June 7 at James and Richelle Corson's Whitecliffs property, will also mark the first of Maggie James' tutorials on queen cell production in 2020.

After producing "tens of thousands" of queen cells since starting the Leeston-based mjqeenb business in the late 1990s, James has scaled back in recent years and gone out on the road imparting knowledge to fellow beekeepers. Her first tutorials took place in 2018, and she followed that up with more dates last winter. In 2020 Covid-19 restrictions could disrupt, but she has plans to deliver at least five more tutorials, starting at the Corson property, Gowanlea.

"I tell about 20 years' experience in the space of four hours. I have details on the slides, but I pick out the most pertinent points to discuss. They have been learnt through my studies and through mixing with commercial beekeepers," James says.

Her beekeeping career began with hobby hives in the 1990s and her skills and knowledge quickly grew. She completed the apiculture certificate at Telford Rural Polytech, as well as their more specialised queen bee rearing certificate, and then she

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Maggie James will launch her winter series of cell-raising tutorials at a field day in Canterbury in June.

launched her own queen-rearing business in Canterbury. That coincided with Airborne Honey's sale of their 6000 hives, meaning there were plenty of new beekeeping businesses established by experienced beekeepers looking for stock.

James got a reputation for producing quality queens and cells and her business continues to operate, although she aims to slow down and her tutorials are a way of branching out. She spreads knowledge of the "Airborne Honey method" of raising cells, but says those attending take what they need from each session.

"I don't just go in there and tell people this is how you have to do it. I explain what works for me, in my area. You have to decide what works for your area, your climate and your type of beekeeping," James says.

Following the Canterbury field day in Whitecliffs, James has four other tutorials planned for the North Island this winter, targeting commercial and long-time hobbyist beekeepers. She will also be offering shorter, less advanced courses, from her Leeston property in June and July. These are geared more towards hobbyists.

The field day at Corson's property on June 7 aims to be a social, as well as educational, occasion James says. Her cell-raising tutorial, which requires paid registration, will run from 9.30am until mid-afternoon. That will be followed by a free event, open to the beekeeping public. It will include a demonstration of Richelle Corson's AFB sniffer dogs, AFB education including a report from an AP1 or AP2 officer, burning of an infected hive, and a barbeque to round out the day.

"Because of the Covid stuff and the isolation, I imagine quite a few people will rock up at three o'clock and want to chew the cud and have a good old gas," James says.

James and the Corsons had their field day mooted before Covid-19 restrictions were enforced and the Canterbury beekeepers have decided to forge ahead with plans. However, they are seeking registrations of interest via email to mjqueenb@xtra.co.nz, as part of safe Covid-19 procedures and so that attendees to either the tutorial, open afternoon, or both, can be kept in the loop.

"Life has to go on and we really have to take the bull by the horns now. There is no point getting to a week beforehand and thinking, oh we really should have done this and that. The worst that can happen is that it may be postponed a week or two," James says. 🐝

Timetable

Sunday 7 June, J & R Corson, 'Gowanlea', 981 Whitecliffs Road 7673

9.30AM-2.30PM

Maggie James Queen Cell Production Tutorial
\$190 pp (GST included)

3PM ONWARDS

Richelle Corson & AFB sniffer dogs demo.

No charge

3.30PM

James Corson AFB hive burning demo & discussion on control techniques & AFB incidences in local areas. An AP1 or AP2 from The American Foulbrood Pest Management Plan will be in attendance to report on AFB in the region.

Socialising & BBQ to follow.

BYO drink, cutlery, plate, salad or dessert. Home kill meat supplied by James & Richelle. Tea, coffee, hot water available.

The long awaited Pumpkin Competition. Other suitably impressive vegetables accepted! Must be homegrown. First prize 1kg Barry Sheehan's famous queen candy. Attendees to events receive a NZ Beeswax goody bag. Registrations by 1 June stating attendance at tutorial and/or open afternoon to mjqueenb@xtra.co.nz. Do not attend without registering.

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Honey, what's happening? I bet that question is rattling around a lot of beekeepers' families.

Here's my take, for better or for worse.

It is clear that over the past two years, the apiculture industry has been a business of haves and have-nots. If you have good manuka sites, you are probably doing just fine. If not, well the cost/price squeeze is hurting. However, it is also clear beekeepers are hard workers and don't easily give up. I think that the current situation may be offering a faint glimmer of hope.

With the Covid-19 pandemic, shelves in stores around the world have emptied. Also, there is a strong link with health, honey in general and manuka honey in particular. I have personally heard that shelves in China are empty of honey and it is being actively sought after.

I have a sense that New Zealand honey especially will now be seen with some favour. Clearly there will be a strong association with New Zealand's sensible and apparently successful approach to dealing with the Covid-19 crisis. The lower New Zealand dollar vis-à-vis the US dollar, should also provide a somewhat better return to the beekeeper.

The main issues I see are the conditions in the major overseas markets and the supply chains. China seems to be getting back to normal, so the supply chains for at least container shipments should be able to get product to that market.



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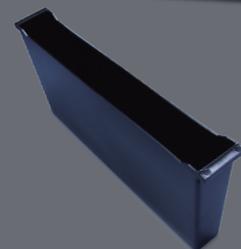


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The US however seems a different story. It is one of confusion and fear approaching chaos. I for one would not be happy making a business trip to the US for many months. However, if a honey business already has contacts and good trading history, I expect that at least manuka honey will arrive on the shelves in the US and sell well.

My personal desire is to see the market for non-manuka honey grow, and the US has always been my preferred first market. I am confident that the Covid-19 situation just helps the potential for non-manuka honey in the US. The strong association of honey and health will add the cherry on top to a marketing campaign, but building the non-manuka honey market in the US will be affected by that country's poor response to the global pandemic.

Still non-manuka honey should see steady penetration in most overseas markets that can rebuild their distribution networks in quick time.

So, I expect that manuka honey will continue strong growth in its existing markets, and non-manuka honey will see a spike in demand to fill shelves in China and South East Asia, followed by a slow but steady growth in sales overseas.

Once the Covid-19 pandemic is behind us, thanks to a vaccine, and borders open, the opportunity to clear large stocks of honey at better prices will present themselves. 🐝



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Beehives provided an escape from the tedium of lockdown life in New Zealand's largest city, says president of the Auckland Beekeepers Club and hobbyist beekeeper Steve Leslie. It has not been all business as usual though and innovation has been required to deliver the club's monthly meeting to their more than 650 members, with the new methods likely to be utilised longer term.



Steve Leslie

Located at the Unitec campus in Mt Albert, among the club's hives are conventional Langstroth, top-bars and long hives. All have proven a welcome distraction for members of the Auckland club during lockdown.

"The hives have been quite good for escaping the boredom and tedium of seemingly endless lockdown," Leslie says.

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"I'm lucky. I'm only about five minutes' drive from the club hives so there is opportunity for me to go down there a couple of times a week and do some work on them and get away from home."

He is often not alone in the task, with other club members visiting the yard to ensure hive health and get their own escape – with everyone careful to follow safe physical-distancing protocols, Leslie says.

Delivering varroa treatments and preparing hives for winter are the major tasks being carried out in autumn.

While hobbyists were permitted to visit hives in the lockdown, the Auckland club has still been impacted. Covid-19 forced the cancellation of the Auckland Easter Show, an event the club had attended for each of the past "20 to 25" years, and it also meant they could not gather for their usual monthly meeting. However, they have been able to utilise a method many workplaces are using to "meet" during lockdowns, and disseminate information to members.

"It was a webinar, as opposed to a Zoom meeting, so we could broadcast to hundreds of people if we needed to. The lockdown pushed us into something new and the feedback has been so positive we could well carry on with it," Leslie says.

About 90 people tuned in to the live webinar in March and it has also been sent out to all club members to watch at their leisure.

"It is about finding ways the club can operate and function effectively during lockdown and finding ways to support our club members to look after their hives and continue to give them good information on activities that need to be done this time of year.

"We might use these techniques more in the future, for intermediate and advanced topics, and put them up on our club website for reference. That way they will be available for new members coming through the club. In that regard, the lockdown, in some ways, has actually pushed the club in to new ways of reaching out to our members," Leslie says, adding, "so far that looks to be successful." 🐝



A pre-lockdown gathering of the Auckland Beekeepers Club at their Unitec site.



Editorial

To Subsidy or Not to Subsidy?



In March the government made available a wage subsidy package – to help those businesses financially affected by Covid-19 restrictions meet remuneration obligations to staff. Some beekeeping businesses have claimed the wage relief, while others have not, but should they?

Every business is different, with differing revenue streams, costs structures, and, dare I say it, business ethics, all which would have played into the decision to dip into the government's 10-billion-dollar-plus subsidy scheme or not.

The application process is clear that among the requirements to receive subsidy is that "actual or predicted revenue is down at least 30% in any four-week period between January and 9 June 2020 because of Covid-19".

Beekeepers should be aware that just because they have received the wage subsidy up front doesn't mean they won't be forced to pay it back, if they are found to be ineligible at a later date. The government has a team of over 100 auditors going through the applications, looking for ineligibility and even cases of fraud.

Some businesses grabbed the subsidy when it was on offer and stashed the money, as an emergency fund. Those operators shouldn't have any trouble paying the money back if obligated – assuming their applications contain accurate reporting and they are not pursued for fraud – but those who have received the money, spent it, and are then found to be ineligible, may find themselves in a spot of bother.

Covid-19 has had wide-ranging impacts on beekeeping operations, raising costs through increased compliance procedures, as well as impacting revenue through lack of sales, such as package bees to Canada (as detailed in *Bee Flights Grounded* on page 2) and even causing honey sales to fall over, to name but a few.

Of course, a beekeeper will have to prove any drop in revenue is Covid-19 related to retain their subsidy and that term "revenue" could be key. Increased operational costs don't affect revenue, they affect profit, and I fear some beekeepers may have misunderstood this.

To be fair, even the government's own websites are sometimes not clear with their terminology, with the term "income" sometimes – perhaps incorrectly – used instead of "revenue".

However, what they have been clear on is that the wage subsidy scheme has not been implemented to prop up businesses which were failing before Covid-19 came about, and there could be a risk that, given the state of the honey industry, some beekeepers could fall into that category.

I am far from an expert in any of these areas, but I have had a lot of discussions with beekeepers over the past month and it is clear we are all impacted in our own ways. With this in mind, I think for some it will be easier to prove loss of revenue than others, if the auditor comes knocking.

To subsidy or not to subsidy? That is the question, but perhaps it won't be the beekeeper, but the auditor, who provides the final answer. 🐝

What is your take on the wage subsidy for beekeepers? Do you have thoughts on Covid-19 and the beekeeping industry? Or anything else impacting beekeepers for that matter. Get in touch via email: editor@apiadvocate.co.nz.



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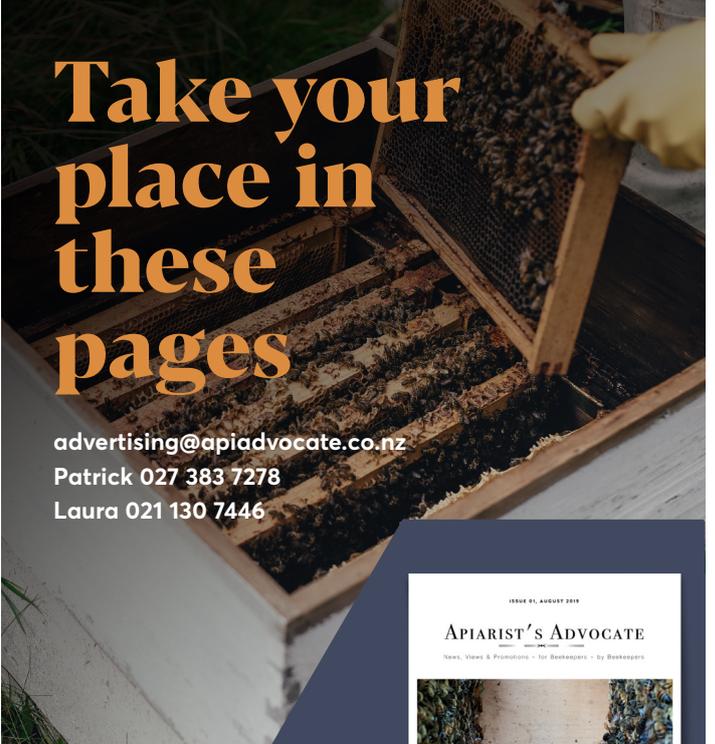
Weather Anomalies: April



These maps provide readers an insight into climate conditions for the calendar month just been, as compared against the long term average. Between them they provide an indication of the level of soil moisture entering the current month, and the conditions that were faced in the previous month. From left to right, the maps are:

- **Soil Moisture Anomaly**, captured on the last day of the month and expressed in millimetres above or below the long term average soil conditions for that date.
- **Rainfall Anomaly**, percentage of rainfall capture for the calendar month just been as compared to the long term average.
- **Sunshine Anomaly**, percentage of bright sunshine hours recorded for the calendar month just been, as compared to the long term average.
- **Temperature Anomaly**, degrees Celsius that the mean daily temperature differed, above or below, from the long term average.

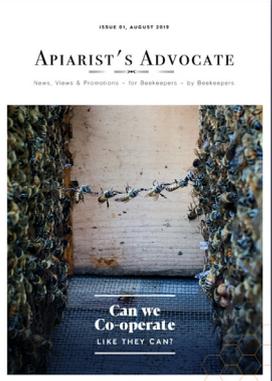
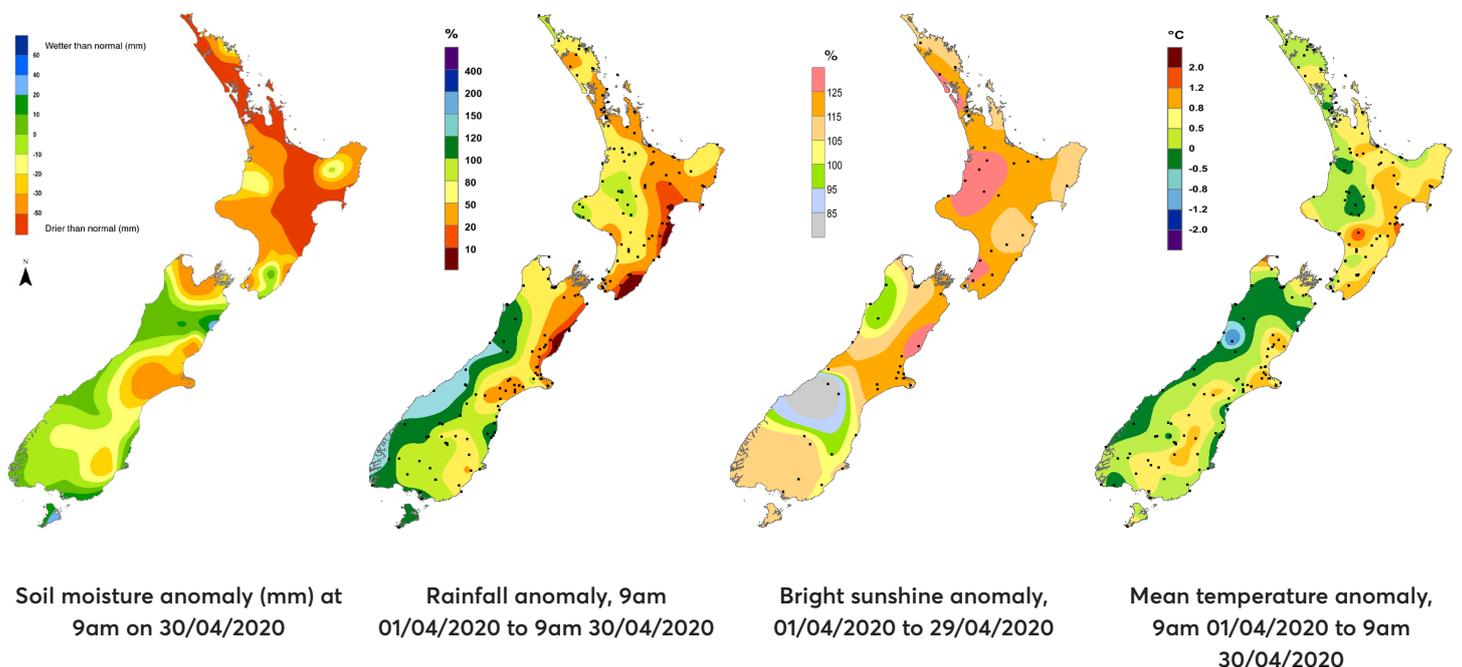
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