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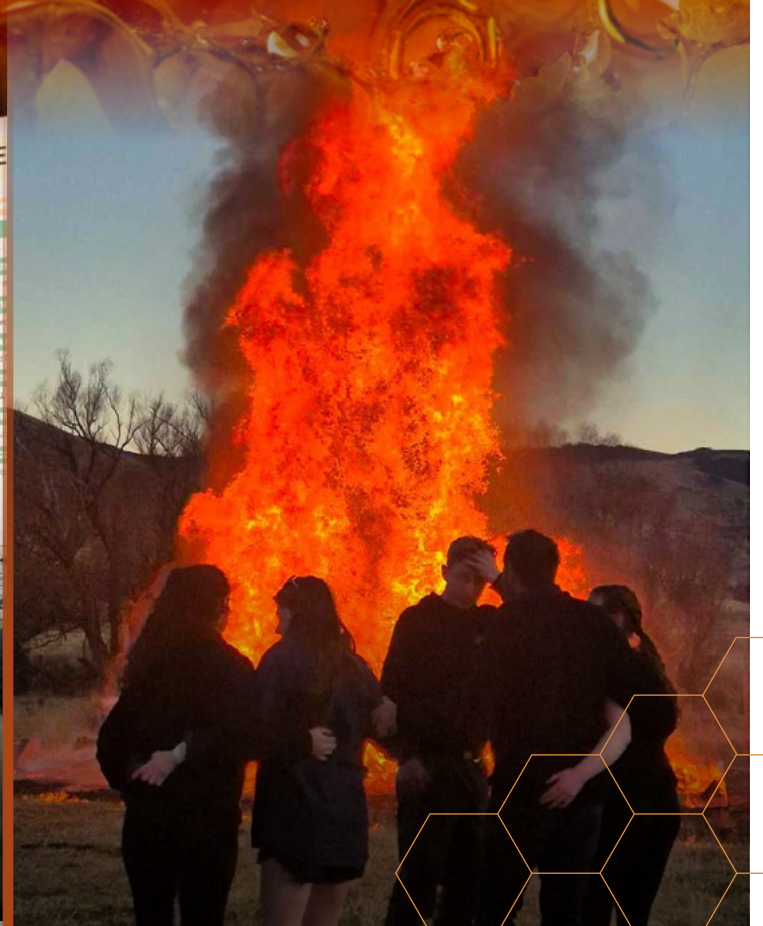
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News, Views & Promotions - for Beekeepers - by Beekeepers

Chasing the Future, and Caught by the Past

Beekeepers are presented 'Project 2030' & Honey and Bees NZ moves ahead...

while receivers move in at Springbank Honey.



Newly Minted Honey & Bees NZ Chair – “We are in Business and We are Serious”



New commercial-beekeeping industry group Honey and Bees New Zealand (H&BNZ) has an inaugural board and chairperson, Murray Bush, who says the serious business of rebuilding trust among beekeepers begins now. Beekeepers must return that trust though he emphasises, and support the group if it is to hold any weight and survive.

And then there were six ... or maybe still eight? Soon to be seven. The first H&BNZ election has resulted in the curious circumstance of a tied vote tally among the two lowest vote-getters, after the ballots closed July 24.

There was an 86% turnout among the 98 eligible voters, cleanly electing Murray Bush, Peter Bell, Matt Goldsworthy, Barry Hantz, Cameron Martin, and Jaime McRae to six seats. Those directors met July 29 for an inaugural board meeting of the group which succeeds Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ) and hopes to unite with New Zealand Beekeeping Inc. There, it was decided another vote will need to take place, as soon as possible, with all voting members to this time be given a choice between the remaining two nominees, Julian McCurdy and Ben Stewart, to fill the seventh and final director seat.



“I couldn’t think of a better legacy project” says now retired Marlborough beekeeper Murray Bush, just two years removed from his family’s three-generations and 108 years in commercial beekeeping, as he now steps into the chairperson role of Honey & Bees NZ’s inaugural board.

Regardless of the result of that, new chair Murray Bush says he expects the eighth-place-getter to be involved in some form from outside the board room, helping shoulder what is likely to be a heavy workload for the elected directors. A part time administrator has been appointed on a three-month term, while the initial meeting of the new leadership has seen them jump straight into the work programme, Bush says.

“We’re in business, and it’s serious,” the new chair stresses, just hours removed from that pivotal first meeting.

“It is important people understand that, because there are people who are sitting on the fence just waiting to see what happens. And we need them to step up now, not later, because the success of the group is going to be determined by who gets counted. We’ve got some pretty serious meetings happening in the next four weeks, we need to be able to say we are the voice of the industry. And for ministers to take us seriously, we need to back that up with some numbers.”

While there has been considerable debate around the narrowing of the new group’s focus to almost purely commercial beekeeping interests, as opposed to ApiNZ’s model which more greatly empowered non-commercial beekeepers and honey marketers, Bush enters his role with a board “unapologetic” of the constitution which H&BNZ will be operating under, but practical.

“The objective of Honey and Bees NZ is to provide the framework for successful commercial beekeeping in New Zealand, and we are unapologetic of this goal. But in the same breath, we cannot operate our bees in isolation. Hobby beekeepers, other industry groups, honey traders, scientists, equipment suppliers and export markets are all part of our industry well-being. The success of H&BNZ will be how we achieve our primary goal, while balancing all the other stakeholders,” Bush says.

He acknowledges that industry success will only come from the collective efforts of beekeepers and “associated personal”, and therefore among the first jobs is creating the networks to harness those efforts.

“Starting immediately, communication channels will be established with UMF, NZBB (New Zealand Bee Health and Biosecurity), Mānuka Collective, MPI and Biosecurity New Zealand, all regional clubs, hubs and ad-hoc beekeeper groups. It’s critical that we give ownership back to grassroots beekeepers and make them feel valued and part of a democracy process that brings

their voice to the top table in whatever form that means," Bush says.

In time, he hopes the group can build the structures which not only allow beekeepers' voices to be best heard, but that will build a new generation of leaders and contributors. For now though, Bush is confident they have the right personal on the board for the right time.

He comes to the chairperson's position two years removed from what was just shy of four decades at the helm, along with his brother, of a multigenerational Marlborough beekeeping business. The J Bush & Sons brand was synonymous with Marlborough beekeeping and renown for their Molesworth blue borage honey, gathered on New Zealand's largest farm. The hives and brand were sold in 2024 to now-fellow-board-member Matt Goldsworthy. That seemingly ended a 108-year connection between the Bush family and commercial beekeeping, which began with Murray's grandfather in 1916. Now though, despite no longer picking up the hive-tool day-in day-out, Bush has reconfirmed a strong connection to the industry.

He says he never intended to be the chair of the new group, but "it's just the way it has evolved" and that he "couldn't get a better legacy opportunity".

"I think it's a once in a lifetime opportunity to be involved in something like this. Clearly it's been a passion of mine, and now that I've got the time to spend on it, I've got to give it my all, and

it's not forever. I'm hoping, if I do my job properly, there's going to be a whole heap of people lining up to take our place. My job is to get the ball rolling," he says.

He stresses that his board is not naïve to the challenges ahead and that they plan to meet regularly over the next several weeks to advance a work programme heavy on the administrative tasks unavoidable in a new undertaking.

While only 98 full (self-defined "commercial" beekeepers) or life members (transferred over from ApiNZ days) were eligible to vote, the total membership role is now around 150, which includes non-commercial beekeepers and other industry stakeholders. More will need to get involved if H&BNZ is to survive, the newly minted chair reinforces

"We need trust from beekeepers, trust in the board, and we need beekeepers to get involved and put their hands up and do the raft of jobs that are going to come their way. Because this is impossible for seven people to achieve. But we can provide the framework for the members to create the future that they want."

Bush is adamant that H&BNZ is future focused and calls the situation of needing membership trust and confidence, before that trust and confidence can be built, "chicken and egg".

"The board is serious, we're open for business, and aiming at giving commercial beekeepers ownership is the key to our future," Bush says, adding optimistically, "and the rest will follow".

Details on H&BNZ and membership can be found [here](#). 🐝

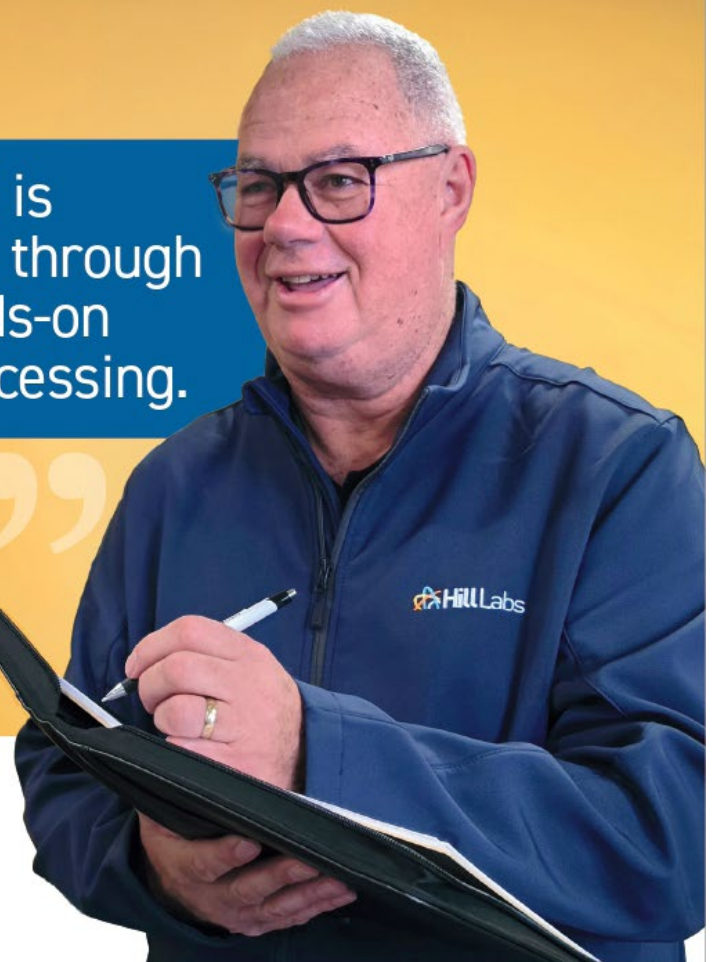
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Project 2030 – A Model for Matching Honey Supply and Demand



At Mānuka Orchard's annual Open Day for 2026, July 24 in Paengaroa, Bay of Plenty, the do-it-all honey facility unveiled their vision for the future of the honey industry. Dubbed 'Project 2030', it seeks to marry new-found optimism in honey markets with the organisation required to better match supply and demand.

"I've got a vision that ours is an industry that other primary sectors look up to," Mānuka Orchard founder, owner and director Logan Bowyer led his presentation to around 200 Open Day attendees with.

That is where the hyperbole began and ended though, as Bowyer fast moved to a practical assessment of the New Zealand honey industry's present situation and how his facility hopes to help guide a sustainable path forward, primarily by providing an online platform where honey buyers can register their needs and producers can forecast their production capabilities.

"The previous model nearly broke us all. We deserve better," Bowyer says of what is commonly referred to as the mānuka 'gold rush', a period in the 2010s where registered hive numbers ballooned 144% from 377,000 to 918,000, creating a 'honey glut'.

The Project 2030 vision, while detailed from the stage of the Paengaroa Community Hall down the road from Mānuka Orchard's honey extraction, storage, processing and sales facility, is also backed by a 'white paper' document which was released

to coincide with the July 24 event. That nine-page paper analyses reports from the Ministry for Primary Industries, KPMG and Apiculture New Zealand to paint a picture of a significant increase in demand for New Zealand honey (primarily mānuka) in the next five years, against a supply base at risk of having growth potential handbraked by rising costs. The growing demand in the US mānuka honey market and the potential provided in the India free trade agreement are highlighted as significant drivers of demand.

Bowyer calls the new paradigm "a positive market not a gold rush", as registered hive numbers sit at 480,000.

"Right now it is a strong spot market for the producer, but that will have to change," he warned the audience of largely beekeepers.

Mānuka Orchard's answer to the question of how to maintain positivity while avoiding a second mānuka honey gold rush is to increase the connection between what the markets need and what New Zealand's beekeepers and landowners are able to produce. Bowyer believes Mānuka Orchard is the place to do that.

After beginning life in 2019 as a honey storage and processing facility, Mānuka Orchard has added honey brokering to their service offerings in recent years, with buyers able to register their honey interest through www.manukaorchard.com and beekeepers able to list their honey for sale on the platform. Now, Bowyer is requesting that buyers signal their future honey needs via the platform, while beekeepers forecast their honey production for the coming season.

"The orders for volume and type are there. What I don't know is what the beekeepers are producing. It would be great to marry that up ahead of time," Bowyer says.

Off-stage, Bowyer acknowledged the challenges of predicting honey crop volumes and varieties months out due to unknown climatic influences, but that as a bank of longer-term data is built predictions will likely become more accurate.

At present the supply-demand coupling area of Mānuka Orchard's website is not live to clients, but he says their staff is using it on the back-end of the website and a screenshot of a bar graph was presented to the Open Day audience. Bowyer expects it go fully live to their users in late-August.

Presently available for purchase through the platform is 457 tonnes of honey and in 2026 more than 120 tonnes of honey has been traded through Mānuka Orchard. A June snapshot of the business presented listed 2044 drums or IBCs of honey in the facility, down from 2480 the previous June and 3500 in June 2024,



Mānuka Orchard owner Logan Bowyer welcomes almost 200 attendees to the honey facility's Open Day on July 24 in Paengaroa where he announced 'Project 2030', including a plan to try and better match honey production with demand. Photo: Dean Taylor



likely mirroring the reduction in New Zealand's honey backlog. Bowyer summarised that all up through their various services they "deal with" approximately 1400 tonnes of honey a year.

Those volumes make Mānuka Orchard an important service provider for many beekeepers, but they are just one player in a much bigger national industry which saw nearly 13,000 tonnes of honey exported in 2025. However, Bowyer believes the data

collection which they hope will underpin Project 2030 will be a scalable model for the wider industry in time.

'The best years for mānuka are ahead,' Mānuka Orchard's white paper declares.

'But those years won't arrive on their own – they'll be built, deliberately, by the people who decide the industry deserves better than the model that nearly broke it.' 🐝



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Springbank Honey Forced to Receivership, Beekeepers Owed Millions, While Brown Family Re-Registers as 'Springhill Honey'

BY PATRICK DAWKINS



Creditors have tipped Brown family companies Springbank Honey Ltd and Glenburn Green Ltd, both of North Canterbury, into receivership. Debts include more than two million dollars outstanding to beekeepers for honey. The list of those waiting to be paid is long but asset sales may be complicated by potential risk of American foulbrood (AFB) contamination and an ongoing investigation by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). Meanwhile, the Brown family continues to trade through a new company that uses the Springbank Facebook page.

Springbank Honey is owned by husband and wife Stephen and Tracy Brown, with Stephen acting as director and several of their children working within the business. Glenburn Green owns 3700ha Glenburn Station in Lees Valley, Canterbury.

Malcolm Hollis and Richard Nacey of Teneo Financial Advisory have been appointed receivers and Hollis says arrangements have been made to oversee what is an uncertain amount of beehives managed out of Springbank's Cust base. Livestock on the Glenburn farm are also being appropriately cared for.

Business operations have been halted though, and Hollis calls the coming proceedings "a typical, vanilla, receivership sale". Assets will be sold and Bank of New Zealand which forced the move will take priority, leaving beekeepers pessimistic about their chances of recouping money owed.

Just how many beehives remain is a big unknown.

"We are in the process of working out what we have got, including hive locations and status of those hives. We need to understand the inventory including its quality," Hollis says.



Springbank Honey owner Stephen Brown. Recently tipped into receivership owing fellow beekeepers millions, the Canterbury company is no stranger to controversy having courted it in 2024 when ordered to destroy AFB-infected beekeeping equipment by fire.

ANYTHING BUT VANILLA

The receivership proceedings might be "vanilla", but Springbank Honey and Stephen Brown's actions within the apiculture industry in recent years have been anything but. As well as overseeing a business taking on others' honey and not paying for it either in full, part, or to terms fully compliant with contracted agreements, the flamboyant beekeeper has regularly rallied against authorities through both social and mainstream media. Rulings which forced the business to destroy beekeeping equipment with either confirmed, or suspected, American foulbrood (AFB) infection have garnered a loud public response from Brown.

That controversy first hit headlines in May 2024 and in June was covered in this publication in an investigation titled *Fire, Fury and a Whole Lot of Hot Air* which found Brown could provide no evidence to back up many of the claims being made against the AFB Agency, now titled New Zealand Bee Health and Biosecurity (NZBB).

MPI have an active investigation – which they would not comment further on – into Springbank Honey due to breaches of the Biosecurity Act after evidence was supplied by NZBB.

SCOPE OF CONTAMINATION

Because of Springbank Honey's history of high AFB infection rates and non-compliance – including "significant" financial debt to the NZBB Trust – Trust chief executive Niha Long and her staff are keeping a close eye on proceedings in Cust.

"The first thing we did with the receivers was make them aware of the seriousness of AFB and the issue we are tackling in that regard. Beekeepers would be rightly worried about the sale of any AFB-infected gear and that is the last thing NZBB want, that gear to get out or infected hives to be resold," Long says.

"The receivers are not beekeepers and so we have provided assistance in understanding the scope of contamination and understanding how many AFB-infected hives there could currently be. That plan is still going on."

For the past two years NZBB have conducted hive inspections twice a year on Springbank hives.

"In that time AFB numbers have declined and the operation has been cleaned up, with our AP2s doing a great job of inspections," Long says, adding that it has not been an easy task.

"The abuse our AP2s have suffered has not been great, it has taken a toll on our team."

STATUTORY DEMANDS

At least three beekeepers have previously taken the first step on the road to forcing liquidation on Springbank Honey, that of seeking reparation for money owed through a statutory demand.

Falcon Apiaries, now taken over by Craig and Paul Stubbs after the death of their father in July 2024, tired of waiting for money which the business was owed and served a statutory demand to Springbank Honey in September of that year, without success. It was an effort to recoup nearly \$574,000 owed following their father's sale of 83 tonnes of honey dew honey in 2024.

Hillside Honey in Northland, who had supplied 41 tonnes of 'high quality manuka honey' in 2024, also moved against Springbank, invoking their statutory demand in April 2025 for approximately \$580,000. Three months later, now-retired Bay of Plenty beekeeper Dale Gifford and wife Donna-Marie Gifford made a similar move, seeking to gain just shy of \$485,000.

The Giffords found success following court proceedings which outlined a series of bumbling mistakes within Springbank Honey and on June 10, 2026, Springbank Honey was ordered to pay the nearly \$485,000 plus costs to the Bay of Plenty couple. Dale Gifford says he has received no such payment, and the Browns'



An ashen and ash-faced Stephen Brown took to social media in 2024, claiming a conspiracy against his business from the AFB Agency. Now in receivership, Springbank Honey also faces an active investigation regarding breaches of the Biosecurity Act.

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companies were tipped into receivership just under a month later, on July 6.

Hillside Honey, owned by husband and wife Benji and Katie Raumaewa, did not find the same success with their demand for payment as, despite independent lab results stating otherwise, an "in-house" trial at Springbank Honey was said to throw doubt over the HMF levels of the honey supplied. The honey in question was blended and freighted to Germany by Springbank Honey.

(The plight of both the Giffords and Hillside Honey is detailed in *The Bitter Sweet Scales of Justice – The Springbank Honey Victims Balancing Fairness with Forgiveness*, page 10).

JOIN THE QUEUE

As with most receivership sales, there is a collection of put-out businesses seeking monies owed, but it will be the bank at the head of proceedings and first in line to be paid once Glenburn Station and Springbank Honey assets are sold.

Among those with registered security are Rainbow Honey and Nelson Honey, both owned by Philip Cropp, who says he is "not holding his breath" over whether he will be paid a substantial sum of money owed.

Craig Stubbs also holds serious doubts as to whether they will be paid.

"It sounds like they owe a lot of money so I am not sure we will receive anything or not. I'm hoping something can filter down though because we have been fighting for it for a few years now. It's not good because my father worked hard for that honey."

In a similar vein, Benji Raumaewa says he understands the money owed to Bank of New Zealand is so substantial that it throws serious doubt over whether his Hillside Honey business will see anything following the receivership process.

"Who would know? They would need to find someone to buy the business and I am not sure anyone is going to touch it," Raumaewa says.

Also in the queue of secured creditors are Farmlands, Coca-Cola Amatil, and Mandeville Machine Rentals Ltd.

SPRING CONTINUES TO BUBBLE

While Springbank Honey may not be trading, the Facebook page with that name and 13,000 followers appears to still be operated by members of the Brown family with the contact email address changed to sales@springhillhoney.co.nz and the profile picture to an AI-generated image of the 'The Brown's' with the tagline 'Springhill'.

Springhill Honey Ltd. was registered as a company on June 26, only 10 days before the Springbank receivership was gazetted. It is directed by Stephen and Tracy's son Max Brown, and Tracy's sister Emma MacIntyre, it is ultimately owned by Springbank Group Ltd. That company operates out of the same Cust address as Springbank Honey Ltd, is directed by Stephen Brown and owned by Max Brown and Keziah Brown.

Uncertainty surrounds what assets Springbank Honey owns, especially when it comes to the beehives, and what are the domain of the recently incorporated Springhill Honey, as Hollis says the receivers are still in the process of taking stock of the inventory.

SLOW WHEELS OF JUSTICE

For Long and the NZBB Trust's perspective, "the wheels of justice can turn slowly", but they *do* and *are* turning, three years on from the first non-compliance at Springbank Honey.

"Beekeepers need to understand there is a cost to non-compliance. I don't want beekeepers to think non-compliance is not punished. There are consequences, but the process can be long," she says.

"For those who have been frustrated by goings on over the past few years I want to assure that everything has been done by my team and I to ensure we get to a favourable outcome." 🐝



The Brown family have sought to rebrand from the beleaguered Springbank Honey to Springhill Honey Ltd, the company registered just days before the receivers moved in. This AI image is prominently used on the Springbank Facebook page.



Emma MacIntyre, sister of Springbank Honey owner Tracy Brown, and Max Brown, son of owners Stephen and Tracy, in happier times, 2021. The pair are directing a freshly formed company, Springhill Honey Ltd. and attempting to market themselves through existing Springbank Honey channels despite the latter's assets now, supposedly, in the hands of the receivers and trading halted.

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The Bitter Sweet Scales of Justice – Springbank Honey Victims Balance Fairness with Forgiveness

BY PATRICK DAWKINS



While many around New Zealand beekeeping circles have viewed the news of Springbank Honey's forced receivership (as detailed in *Springbank Honey Forced to Receivership, Beekeepers Owed Millions*) with a "good riddance" response, for some it is not as simple as that. At least six beekeeping or honey businesses are still owed substantial sums of money, including two couples at either end of their careers. Dale Gifford, limited physically, has seen his plans for retirement upset due to the missing money, while a burgeoning Northland business grinds forward against a tight financial handbrake.

After the best part of 40 years beekeeping Dale Gifford thought he had a plan to stay closely connected to the industry he loved in his retirement years, through honey trading. Inclusion Body Myositis – "IBM, but I am not a computer," he quips – hastened the sale of his and wife Donna-Marie's Bay of Plenty beekeeping business to their staff in 2019, but there was still honey trading to be had.

"All it involved was paperwork, the forklift occasionally, and keeping up with the RMP. All of that can be done without a great deal of physical danger," Gifford explains.

IBM is a rare muscular disease, but more common in men over 50, which causes slow, progressive weakness of finger flexor and quadricep muscles, among others.

"There is currently no human cure and no interventions. It is not life threatening, but a gentle downhill over a long period of time. Early onset muscle wasting," Gifford explains with well-versed succinctness.

When they sold the hives, the Giffords held onto the honey in the shed, looking for a buyer, but after being in business for nearly four decades through good times and bad, their timing and luck on what was to be their last significant honey sale was poor.



Stephen Brown, owner of Springbank Honey, is all laughs at Gulfood food show in Dubai in February, where he travelled with his family in last-gasp efforts to trade honey, while the business captioned photos "#holiday", despite still owing millions to Kiwi beekeepers who supplied him honey.



The sun has set on Bay of Plenty beekeeper Dale Gifford's working career earlier than he had planned, due to a combination of a rare muscle-degenerating disease and the injustice of a "charlatan" honey buyer in Stephen Brown who owes him nearly \$485,000.

"With Covid the prices plummeted and the sales dropped through the floor. So, what I stored up as my retirement honey wasn't moving, but it was ageing," the now 71 year-old explains.

"I sold to Springbank. They offered me a bargain basement price. I thought, take the money and refresh. Get fresh honey stock."

A "bargain basement price" but still more than \$700,000 that should have come the Giffords' (along with some minor shareholders') way through a series of instalments in 2024, culminating in a final payment January 2025.

"Of course, they took the honey and paid less than 20 percent of what the contract was for. All I ended up with was less than two drums in my store," Gifford rues.

CLAIM V COUNTER-CLAIM

By July of 2025, 15 months after first signing the sale contract with Springbank Honey and six months after the final payment should have been made, the Giffords had tired of what would later be detailed by the judge assigned to rule on the case as "explanations and excuses" so numerous that "I will not traverse them all". The Bay of Plenty retirees issued a statutory demand on Springbank Honey to settle the nearly \$485,000 owed to them and their business partners.

That year at least two other beekeepers would make the same claim, with Springbank launching counter-claims in an effort to slow the aggrieved party's efforts to be reimbursed for honey supplied. In two cases Springbank Honey was successful in throwing enough doubt into the argument that judges ruled

the statutory demands, each for between \$500-600,000, could not be upheld, but in the case of Gifford and Gifford versus Springbank Honey Ltd, the flailing business which would ultimately be only a little over a month out from the receivers moving in to halt trading, was ordered to pay the full \$484,795.80 within 15 days.

THE BUMBLING HONEY TRADERS

The hearing report paints Springbank Honey as bumbling in many dealings with the Giffords, with a regular lack of attention to detail, bringing Springbank Honey's competence as honey traders further into question.

"I find that the set-off counterclaim raised by Springbank is no more than an assertion and not a genuine and substantial dispute," judge Brittain ruled.

Among the blunders from within Springbank was the revelation they sent a letter in March 2025 to "Mr Gillford". But the gaffs didn't stop at the top, within it they referred to supply contract "2423" when the Giffords' contract was in fact number 2427. Astonishingly there was more, "that document appears to be a draft" the judge's ruling bluntly states, referring to the letter which still had key details omitted. In their place templated terms of '[Supplier Name]' and 'Sincerely [Your Name]' were used.

If that wasn't enough to erode confidence in the capabilities of Springbank Honey, admission from staff that contracts "could have been put in the wrong place" and hence they were not aware of the full amounts owed won't have helped.



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In further sign of the storm circling the Cust-based company owned and directed by long-time beekeeper Stephen Brown, administrative tasks were hindered in April 2025 due to a raid by police and the Ministry for Primary Industries, "resulting in the seizure of all laptops and phones", so admitted a staff member in correspondence to Gifford.

The Brown family continued to travel the world attempting to sell honey though, as recently as February in Dubai at Gulfood, the world's biggest food show. From there Stephen, Tracy and many of their children showcased their travel photos via Facebook, captioned both #FamilyBusiness and #holiday.

HILLSIDE HONEY

"I feel really sorry for Benji at Hillside," Gifford says.

That's Hillside Honey, based in Northland, owned by Benji and Katie Raumaewa, and operating for the past 10 years.

"He got smoked worse than me, because he had actually done his due diligence," Gifford says, regarding a written and signed personal guarantee from Brown which Benji Raumaewa obtained before releasing \$580,000 worth of honey to Springbank in 2024.

Hillside Honey beat the Giffords to the statutory demand station by a couple of months and, despite that personal guarantee to pay from Brown, Springbank were able to introduce enough doubt into the case to say the demand need not stand, thanks to some expert advice.

"It's all a croc, their whole story, but it's just enough to put a grain of doubt in there," Raumaewa says, his business still waiting on the money he says it is owed.

In an almost identical move to that which would be presented months later against the Giffords, Springbank Honey claimed there was an inherent defect in the honey supplied by Hillside causing its HMF (hydroxymethylfurfural) levels to spike. Springbank Honey claimed, without evidence, that a customer in Germany rejected their supply of honey, which included both the Giffords' and Hillside's honey, due to high HMF levels.

By the time the batch reached Germany and was tested in January 2025 it had been out of the producers' possessions for approximately eight months, Springbank had admitted blending it, and it had negotiated a 57-day journey via ship.

"How long can you hold onto honey until you stuff something up then go back and say 'it is someone else's fault'?", an incredulous Raumaewa asks.



Benji Raumaewa, owner of Hillside Honey in Northland, is still waiting on nearly \$580,000 he says is owed by Springbank Honey, which entered receivership in July.

"We test, we get the results, there is not really anything else we can guarantee. I wouldn't sell my honey if I had to guarantee an HMF level. The HMF is impacted by storage, its temperature ... you can't predict what the buyer holds it in. You have no control of that honey once it leaves your yard. It doesn't make sense."

Court findings detailing the Hillside case state that the honey supplied had HMF readings of less than 3mg/kg upon dispatch from Northland in April 2024 – "it was fresh honey, straight from extraction, good quality, Northland, mānuka," is how Raumaewa describes it. The batch it was blended into was sampled and this was sent to Germany for testing where an HMF reading of 9.7 was returned in October. On November 10 Springbank happily exported the honey and upon landing in Germany it was tested in a German lab in January, returning an HMF reading of 28.5.

"Blending low HMF with high is what these guys do. They punch things into a calculator based on what they think they can blend. It is not my problem. I supplied the honey with test results. You are talking six months after I gave up the honey that they did these blends. What sort of conditions were they sitting in for six months? There are so many unknowns," Raumaewa says.

Springbank claimed the honey was not acceptable to their German client and, at a cost of \$600,000, honey was required to be airfreighted to Germany as compensation. No evidence was provided of this in the case of both Hillside and the Giffords though. In ruling the Giffords' case, the judge called them "no more than an assertion".

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ENOUGH DOUBT

So, why were then Giffords able to uphold their demand for payment and the Raumaewas at Hillside not?

"In the Hillside case they produced a supposed expert, and in our case they didn't, which allowed us to win," Gifford says, while conceding that the cases were actually near identical.

Springbank claimed Hillside's honey must have been somehow defective to cause the HMF spike and thus conducted 'in-house incubation trials' on the honey samples at their Canterbury facility. Michelle Hawke, business manager for ALS Foods NZ (trading as Analytica Laboratories), provided independent analysis of the situation in the Hillside case.

"It is impossible for me or anyone to determine how or why [this spike] happened given the incubation study and testing was not conducted by ALS or any other third party," she concluded, after also saying "based off the incubation study done by Springbank there would appear to be something irregular about the HMF performance of the samples that went into the batch".

That assessment seemingly threw doubt on the situation. "It was just enough for the judge, coming from an expert witness," Raumaewa reflects. Hillside continue to fight for what they say they are owed though, with the dispute moving to arbitration.

A "HUGE FINANCIAL HIT"

For the Northland couple the whole saga has shackled their business.



Hillside Honey provided Springbank Honey with 41 tonnes of "fresh Northland manuka" honey, but getting paid for it has proven impossible, even with a personal guarantee signed by Springbank owner Stephen Brown before the honey left the Hillside yard.

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"We have had to make different decisions in our business because we have not had that money. It has impacted us for sure," Raumaewa says.

"It was a huge financial hit. It was three years ago the contract was signed up. With the honey prices being so down it was a double whammy. But hey, we have survived, come through it. Now we look toward the future. You can't really dwell on it."

At times it had him questioning whether he wanted to be a part of an industry where such injustice could occur, and then there was the mental strain for both he and his wife. "You can't bury your head in the sand though," he says.

"I just don't want to see the guy trading. He shouldn't be in the industry."

NOT TRADING

Not trading is exactly the position which the Giffords have been left in and, with the recent lapsing of their honey facility registration, the final days have passed in a beekeeping and honey career which began alongside "a bunch of ex hippies" in a small Christian fellowship in Paengaroa in the 1980s.

"Of them were some of those who started Comvita. Alan Bougen was part of that little Christian fellowship," Gifford recalls.

"The beekeeper for Comvita at the time asked me to shift some hives one night, and I never got away. So, that was how I started. I worked for Comvita."

When he demanded a wage rise or he would walk, the Comvita board called his bluff and Gifford says he was left jobless. However, he agreed to lease the hives back for one year and then bought them as Comvita sought capital – money which would help grow them into the country's largest honey business.

All the while the Giffords ran their own business in the Bay.

"I have been beekeeping for 40 years and the New Zealand honey industry ran on trust. Your word was your bond, because it was small. After 40 years I was selling up my final, stored, crop ... Then the trust was gone and all of a sudden a charlatan was involved. That is unfortunately the story of mānuka. It becomes a gold rush and a lot of people who are dishonest enter the race."



Dale Gifford calls Springbank Honey owner Stephen Brown a "charlatan" but says, "I have to walk in forgiveness towards the man".

RIGHTEOUS BUT NOT INDIGNANT

That dishonesty appears to cut Gifford as deeply as his loss of funds. Ever since he was "saved", "way back in the Comvita days", he says striving to practice Christian values has shaped his life.

"You can verbalise the values, but living them is a different story," he points out.

That mantra has seen Gifford undertake mission work through the church, travelling to Afghanistan and helping several Afghan refugee families settle in Tauranga, as well as being involved in a programme which supports persecuted Christian women in Pakistan. And he lives the values regarding the Springbank saga too, as he seeks justice without revenge.

"I have to walk in forgiveness towards the man," Gifford says of Brown. "I too was forgiven, so I can't hold anything against him."

It's a magnanimous attitude, but as he watches the sunset over Welcome Bay from his semi-rural home, perched in a raised and spring-loaded chair due to his "it's not a computer" IBM, Gifford seems content despite the sour taste left by his final honey sale.

"I sleep in white sheets and I get a feed every day. I have Jesus in my life, what more could you want?" he asks, genuinely.

"I was in beekeeping because I loved it. We made an OK living for all those years, we made a good living, but we were in it because we loved it. So, it was a disappointing end to what was a great life," he says, adding "not that it has ended yet."

Whether he refers to just life, or also the search for justice in the Springbank Honey saga, remains to be seen. 🐝

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Takeaways from Mānuka Orchard Open Day 2026



It's become a staple on the honey industry's calendar and in 2026 Mānuka Orchard's annual Open Day on July 24 was bigger than ever, with nearly 200 attendees filing into the Paengaroa Community Hall where a range of speakers and trade displays greeted them. Concluding with the unveiling of the honey facility's aspirational 'Project 2030', there was plenty of expertise imparted. Here's our key takeaways from the event.

- **Banding together** – As elections for the inaugural board of new industry group Honey and Bees New Zealand were hours from closing, Northland beekeeper Liam Gavin encouraged beekeepers to join the fledgling organisation – “get behind it, we have all been asking for it for years” – while Mānuka Orchard owner Logan Bowyer, speaking from the perspective of not a beekeeper but one who was soon to unveil his business's attempt at a form of collective data sharing through 'Project 2030', added “you will be amazed at what happens when you have a united voice”.
- **Less left to sell** – Bowyer detailed Mānuka Orchard's “left to sell” percentage of honey as of June in each of the past five years. Around 50% of the facility's honey was left to sell in winter 2023 and 2024, this had fallen to 35% by last winter and is now at 20%. Speaking of the industry's position as a whole Bowyer declared, “we are trending in the direction of running out of stock and my personal position is we are at risk of closing markets”.
- **Blending bread and butter** – Bowyer called honey blending Mānuka Orchard's “bread and butter”, saying they blend between 20 and 30 tonnes of honey most weeks. “If you are not doing it, you are leaving money on the table” he told beekeepers.
- **Sharing the VSH** – Mid Canterbury beekeeper Rae Butler, in the midst of a national tour of workshops imparting knowledge of breeding for varroa resistance, implored beekeepers to prioritise increasing the varroa sensitive hygiene capabilities of their bees. “It's a waste of time if only a couple of beekeepers in New Zealand are breeding for resistance,” she says, pointing to the diminished resistant ability of the drone population. “If my neighbours are not doing it, it's a waste of time.”
- **Col-Loss Pike on the way out** – After 11 years at the helm of the New Zealand apiculture industry's annual Colony Loss Survey, Pike Stahlmann-Brown announced MPI had decided to take the task in-house, leaving him out of the job. He was diplomatic about the move, but thanked beekeepers for their world-leading survey response rates over the years. “This has been a big part of my life,” he concluded, while Bowyer added “it's hard to imagine there is anyone in the country better suited to fill this job than Pike”.
- **Recapping the numbers one last time** – Diving into the numbers from the 2025 Col-Loss NZ survey Stahlmann-Brown clearly presented data on varroa control methods, summarising “Commercial beekeepers are using amitraz at much higher numbers than hobbyists, commercial beekeepers are using oxalic acid at much higher numbers than hobbyist and commercial beekeepers are using flumethrin in lower numbers than hobbyists.”
- **Thankless Wasp Control** – Col-Loss results tell us 49% of beekeepers controlled wasps in 2025 and estimates that 12,200 wasp nests were eliminated thanks to those efforts – “Good on you to the beekeepers, it goes largely unrecognised,” Stahlmann-Brown added.
- **Imbalanced diet** – The research of pollination biologist Melissa Broussard is always of interest to the audience in the heart of kiwifruit country and recent analyses of the nutritional value of a variety of kiwifruit pollen was telling. While there were differences between red, gold and green, overall “kiwifruit pollen by itself is not adequate” and access to the wider environment is important the expert stressed. “Feeding of nutritional supplements should be considered,” Broussard said, adding that high fat pollen is needed to balance honey bee diets.
- **MPI alliance still in talking phase** – MPI regional advisor for Bay of Plenty Denis Collins wasn't giving much away regarding the government's proposed “Honey and Bee



Approximately 200 attendees were on hand at Mānuka Orchard's Open Day in Paengaroa, July 24, to get insight into the honey facility's offerings as well as take in various expert presentations.

Alliance" which would bring various industry groups together around the same table, saying just "There is a lot of talking going on from an MPI perspective. We are very keen to see something happen."

- **Insurance and mop ups** – Also wearing the MPI badge was Sharon Morrell who has spent time on the front-line of the yellow-legged hornet response in Auckland. Having not seen a hornet nest since April 2 is encouraging because that date is earlier than the experts thought the pest would shut down for winter. She called the current deployment of fipronil poison, Vespex, "an insurance policy" to "mop up anything left over and, also as a bonus, lower the wasp population".
- **Review and ... repeat?** – Morrell said the hornet response is undergoing a review of the spring and summer efforts and, if more hornets are found "the same pattern will occur, with some tweaks" once the weather warms.
- **Leaving some behind** – In his last month working for Zespri, long-time connection to the beekeeping industry Shane Max detailed a study of 15 green, Hayward, kiwifruit orchards between Edgecomb and Katikati post-pollination last season which revealed only around half the flowers were fully pollinated in some orchards. Max called the results "quite significant" and "a concerning worry" for the kiwifruit industry. "I think the worry is hive quality, especially in reused hives."
- **Here comes the sun** – Max affirmed what many beekeepers in the audience likely knew – providing gaps (either sizeable holes or whole strips removed) in hale netting above hives, along with access to direct sunlight, is critical to maximising hives' performance as pollinators.
- **Honey Research Unit** – "Spread the word about the Honey Research Unit," implored University of Waikato honey researcher Megan Grainger of the institution's new lab, having detailed their research into diastase levels in, and phenolic profile of, mānuka honey, topics which could assist market entry and marketability. "If you have a problem with honey, we want you to come to us so we can solve it," Grainger said of her team of honey gurus.
- **Know your role** – Following Grainger's presentation, Bowyer offered a succinct summary: "Marketing's job is to squeeze whatever story we can out of our honey; Megan's job is to find that story; and our job is to make sure we don't negatively affect that honey along the way".
- **Speed you roll** – One long-time beekeeper who has been largely absent from industry-wide events in recent years, but has previously served in industry governance, was heard privately praising the positivity emanating from the Open Day, even going so far as to say the mood of the industry at the event had "reinvigorated" them. 🐝



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Departing AFB Chair – “I Bloody Enjoyed it So Much”



After a highly eventful six years on first the board of the American Foulbrood (AFB) Management Agency and then seeing through its transition to the New Zealand Bee Health and Biosecurity Trust (NZBB) as chairperson, Mark Dingle recently departed the seat, **replaced by Simon Cook**. He reflects on a much-changed industry and what's next.

There's now a hole in "professional director" Mark Dingle's life. Yes, he still has the bees – two hives in the front yard of his Christchurch property –, he's still got gigs on the board of several health organisations, and more besides, but sitting on the AFB board since 2019 and chairing it 2022-26 was hugely rewarding.

"I really, really enjoyed it," Dingle says.

"But I think that serving two terms is fair enough. You've got six years to make a difference and, if you haven't delivered what you set out to deliver, you've got to step aside and let somebody else have a go. The only downside is that I bloody enjoyed it so much."

And that time was anything but dull, and the achievements anything but minor in what he describes as "now a far more professional organisation". A controversy regarding the wording of when levy payments were due welcomed him to the board in 2020, but was just the tip of the iceberg of events and major undertakings to follow. They included, ApiWeb's transition to HiveHub in 2021; an ongoing 10 year operational plan review (that the minister is still yet to embed); Springbank Honey putting the Agency in the firing line and making national headlines; A change in chief executive; the move from AFB Agency to NZBB Trust and ensuing beekeeper backlash; the introduction of spore testing and

increased honey testing for AFB; and looking in from the outside on the yellow-legged hornet response.

The most high-profile of those was by far the Springbank Honey controversy in 2024, after the Canterbury Honey business was ordered by the Agency to destroy AFB infected, or likely infected, hives and equipment in an effort to diminish spread of the disease. It outraged owner Stephen Brown and mainstream media picked up on the story, with Dingle even fronting the story on the six o'clock television news, among others.

"It was a learning exercise," the departing chair reflects.

"We hadn't had that degree of exposure previously. And in fact, a lot of positives came from it. The media exposure drew attention to AFB, increased the recognition of the Management Agency at the time. And, in fact, in many ways, galvanised the industry together."

CLIMBING INCIDENCE RATES

Dingle's tenure on the board coincided with the biggest decline in registered beehive numbers in New Zealand's history, and with it a huge reduction in the levy base which funds operations. While the AFB incidence rate (hives infected divided by total hives registered) climbed from 0.31% in 2019 to 0.52% in 2025, total cases have stayed relatively stable in that time, 2783 in 2019 and now 2944 since 1 July 2025.

So, is eradication of the disease actually possible? Dingle is still of the belief it is.

"What we're seeing now is concentrated pockets of AFB. So, if you take last year, up to the end of May, 61% of the cases of AFB came from 15 commercial beekeeping operations. If we can work more closely with those commercial beekeepers to help them with their AFB management plan, then we could, over the course of the next 18-24 months, get rid of 61% of the current cases."

GET SMART – TEST AND QUARANTINE USED GEAR

Easier said than done, so what do those beekeepers need to do to make that progress? A good start would be getting smarter when trading in used beekeeping equipment, Dingle says.

"In probably 50% of those AFB cases, it arises from them buying second-hand gear that they didn't do a QPCR test on before they parted with the cash. And when they bought that second-hand gear they didn't quarantine it or put it in a specific apiary and keep an eye on it."

Some in the beekeeping community, including Springbank Honey, have raised concerns regarding spore testing and how it should be used by the Agency. Dingle says he believes in the science and it can be a hugely beneficially tool.



Mark Dingle says he thoroughly enjoyed his six years on the board of the AFB Agency, including a change to the NZBB Trust while chair, and his exit from the task has left a hole in his life.

"I'm not saying that's the only tool, and this is what they were getting worked up about. It's not used purely in isolation, but if there has been an AFB outbreak nearby, or if the hive is generally looking a bit off-colour, these are tools that we should be prepared to use. They're at our disposal and we should use them effectively."

POSITIVE SIGNS

With improving honey prices comes improved sentiment in the beekeeping industry and it is an opportunity that Dingle says should not be wasted.

"I think we really need to work together on how we're going to maximise the opportunity that is there in front of us. I see a lot of positive upswing for the sector. But at the same time, we have to do it in a way that our health and biosecurity is front of mind.

"What we don't want to see is a return to the past where there are a lot of cowboys attracted to the mānuka gold rush. In some cases, we're still paying the price. But I think there's a huge amount of opportunity."

A ROLE BEFITTING THE NAME

He's an advocate for extending the mandate of NZBB beyond its limited AFB scope as a way of putting that bee health and biosecurity front of mind – perhaps not surprising given the name change which the former "AFB Agency" underwent under his leadership – and is vexed at why beekeepers don't show more interest in matters of biosecurity.

"If we continue with our head in the sand and say, 'oh no it'll never arrive in New Zealand' or 'it'll never affect me', that's short-sighted. And you'll pay the price."

So why should an agency set up for the specific task of eliminating AFB from managed beehives risk distracting itself with a broader role?

"I think there's a lot of crossover. If we think about bee health and you've got your head in the brood box looking for AFB. Are you also looking for other exotics at the same time? Well, you should be. You're already there. Are you looking for varroa and how effective your varroa treatments are? Yes. So, to me, it's just a logical extension of what's already occurring," Dingle says.

"And if it's not NZBB, then who's it going to be? Do they have the skills and expertise? Do they have the network of AP2s who could, and should, be trained up to identify exotics? Do they also know what they're looking for in terms of other pests and diseases? That to me would be a very quick and easy extension of what NZBB is already doing."



In 2024 Mark Dingle fronted media coverage for the AFB agency, including this TVNZ segment, after a media storm was created by Springbank Honey.

OPPORTUNITY

Now though, the Canterbury hobbyist beekeeper is just a levy payer and interested observer to NZBB. He was one of but a few dissenting votes when Apiculture New Zealand members chose to shift to the new Honey and Bees NZ constitution, which removes voting rights of non-commercial beekeepers.

"I voted against it from my perspective, not as the chair of NZBB, but as a hobbyist beekeeper. And I see these changes doing nothing for hobbyists," Dingle explains.

"I see them as the sector body that I thought I was part of, turning their back on 7,500 hobbyist beekeepers nationally. And for that reason alone, they're asking me to belong to an organisation that I don't have a say in how it's run. And that's why I voted against it."

A weighted voting structure that gave hobbyist beekeepers at least some say in elections would have been more prudent he believes, but that he does understand "where they are, what they want to do, and what they're trying to achieve".

There's still space around that freshly minted board table of elected directors for two co-opted experts too. So, despite voting against the concept, would the beekeeper and "professional director", be willing to consider filling the big gap left by his NZBB departure by one with Honey and Bees NZ?

"Absolutely, I would. Because I'm so invested in the sector, and I want to see it succeed," he says, adding "I think there is a huge opportunity ahead of us." 🐝



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Mānuka Honey Bolters — Saudi Arabia & South Korea



BY BRUCE ROSCOE

Some honey industry observers appear to believe that the mānuka boom was an historical event. Recent trade data don't support that conclusion. Non-traditional markets such as Saudi Arabia and South Korea have rocketed to top-10 status by value. Elsewhere, the dark horse of Romania is in the ascendant. For exporters, off the beaten track may be the place to be.

Saudi Arabia and South Korea may seem as different as kabsa and kimchi. But put those staples of Arabian and Korean cuisine aside, and similarities come into view. While anchored in ages-old culture and tradition, both are young states — Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932; the Republic of Korea in 1948 — created in postwar geopolitical realignments.

Saudi Arabia's oil industry was kick-started by the Arabian American Oil Company. South Korea's early economic foundation was laid by the replication of Japanese industries — steelmaking and shipbuilding and later car and consumer electrical goods manufacturing.

Both countries share the same level of per-capita income at approximately USD36,000 (World Bank data; latest year). While Saudi Arabia is deeply Islamic and South Korea ingrained in Confucianism, both seem progressively cosmopolitan in outlook. And both have developed a strong taste for mānuka honey.

ULTRA HIGH VALUE

Measured by the FOB price (free on board, which does not include freight or insurance costs), Saudi Arabia at NZD147.10 per kilogram, returns the highest value of any export market (CY2025 data). The weighting of retail-pack monofloral mānuka honey in the mix is also among the highest at 91.9%. Methylglyoxal (MGO) levels exceeding 800 milligrams per kilogram of mānuka honey explain the high price.

By value, honey exports to Saudi Arabia have grown at a compound annual rate of 25.5% in the 10 years to CY2025, when the FOB value reached NZD15.3m to place the country eighth most valuable export market (see Table 1).

Saudi Arabia is the largest of the six Gulf states. The five others which border the Arabian (or Persian, to Iran) Gulf are Oman, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait, and each has become a high-value market for monofloral mānuka honey. CY2025 exports to the smaller five states, led by UAE, reached NZD8.3m.



The six Arabian Gulf States, and their proximity to Iran and the contentious Strait of Hormuz.

Table 1: Trend in Honey Exports to Saudi Arabia (CY2015-CY2025)

CY(a)	Volume(b)	Value(c)	Price(d)
2015	34,536	1,577,744	45.68
2016	41,374	2,988,357	72.23
2017	65,634	5,582,012	85.05
2018	31,133	2,090,390	67.14
2019	151,267	6,668,477	44.08
2020	158,329	16,058,204	101.42
2021	135,302	9,217,283	68.12
2022	183,547	15,293,939	83.32
2023	118,450	9,141,634	77.18
2024	160,889	17,861,013	111.01
2025	103,955	15,291,378	147.10
CAGR(%) (e)	11.6	25.5	12.4

Notes:

(a) Calendar years (b) Kilograms (c) NZD FOB
(d) NZD per kg. (e) CAGR = 10-year compound annual growth rate (2015 = year 0).

Source: Statistics NZ

ENTRY TACTICS

Dubai, the most populous of the emirates, hosts Gulfood, which it terms the world's largest annual food and beverage exhibition. Seeds of success in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf state markets almost without question were planted during participation at earlier Gulfood shows.

New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (NZTE; an international business development agency) plays a pivotal role. Its representatives, who are available for hire as trade consultants, are stationed within New Zealand embassies.

Exporters in this writer's circle report substantial benefits from such consultancy, the more so for markets where language is the beginning of the unfamiliar and little is as it may seem. The fact of receiving a call from an embassy, which often is how calls are introduced, opens doors and oils gears. In Saudi Arabia, where the monarch is also head of government, official status is imbued with royal prestige.

WARZONE

Products exported to the Arabian Gulf states arrive in a warzone. The US-Iran conflict has escalated and entered its sixth month. All Gulf states host US military bases or installations, all of which, Iran has stated, are targets. Our map of Arabian Gulf states shows the nearness of Iran. The Strait of Hormuz at about 33 kilometres is no wider than Lake Taupo at its widest point.

Mānuka honey export data for the first half of any calendar year are only broadly indicative, as export volumes to the main markets in the northern hemisphere tend to concentrate in the second half to meet winter demand. For what they are worth, January-May data are encouraging. By value, the five-month total for the largest Gulf markets of Saudi Arabia and UAE increased 106.2% to NZD13.4m and 2.3% to NZD2.3m (year-on-year comparisons). The trade appears threatened most by suspension of commercial air services.

SOUTH KOREA

If the mānuka market peaked in CY2020, South Korea missed the memo. Exports to the republic that struggles to free itself from Japan's shadow reached NZD18.1m in CY2025, ranking the country seventh highest-value honey market. (Table 2 shows the 10-year volume, value, and price compound annual growth rates of 20.8%, 23.4%, and 2.1%.)

Although values for the top six markets range tall buildings higher at NZD29.8m (Australia) to NZD140.0m (US), the FOB price achieved for South Korea at NZD52.28 per kilogram was 38.9% higher than the average for all markets and reflected the high weighting (83.9%) of retail-pack monofloral mānuka honey.

Volume shipped to South Korea ran at an average 6.6 tonnes per week in CY2025, compared with just 1.5 tonnes 10 years earlier. Expansion of exports to this market is an achievement more remarkable for being unsupported by any free trade agreement. The country does not belong to the 12-member Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Honey exporters, therefore, must wrestle with a complicated tariff, quota, and advance fee deposit system.

This market appears most navigable by large-scale, well-resourced exporters, export businesses operated by Koreans who can fathom the labyrinthine system, and exporters who engage the services of NZTE. As in the case of Saudi Arabia, NZTE operates a team from within the New Zealand Embassy in the South Korean capital of Seoul, with like advantages that the impression of official connection confers.

(Much would simplify if South Korea were to accede to CPTPP but accession would likely be blocked by Japan until a bilateral fisheries dispute is resolved.)

New Zealand honey brands with a strong footprint in Japan have a unique advantage in South Korea, for reasons both historical and psychological. Owing to the legacy of Japanese rule of the Korean peninsula from 1910-1945, many South Koreans seem



Japan & the Korean Peninsula. Just a 2.5 hour flight between the countries for honey sellers.

Table 2: Trend in Honey Exports to South Korea (CY2015-CY2025)

CY(a)	Volume(b)	Value(c)	Price(d)
2015	52,144	2,211,125	42.40
2016	75,575	2,908,807	38.49
2017	27,884	1,267,626	45.46
2018	84,057	4,034,433	48.00
2019	50,399	2,889,469	57.33
2020	80,852	3,936,478	48.69
2021	81,894	5,670,225	69.24
2022	158,840	8,460,409	53.26
2023	176,912	12,183,604	68.87
2024	221,830	10,281,063	46.35
2025	346,144	18,097,314	52.28
CAGR(%) (e)	20.8	23.4	2.1

Notes:

(a) Calendar years (b) Kilograms (c) NZD FOB
(d) NZD per kg. (e) CAGR = 10-year compound annual growth rate (2015 = year 0).

Source: Statistics NZ.

possessed of a notion that “the good things that Japan has, we should have too”. Those include trends in natural foods as well as fashions.

A Japan marketing visit is easily extended to South Korea. A direct flight from Tokyo to Seoul at about 2.5 hours takes an hour less than Auckland to Sydney.

ROMANIA

Romania, a European Union (EU) member, appears as a dark horse ready to bolt. It first appeared in honey export data as late as CY2017, for a volume of 60 kilograms worth NZD3,791. Exports to the former communist state have continued each year, and in

**“Unique
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Romanian honey producer and exporter Rom Honey Group advises that URF™ “measures the properties of honey and compliance with international quality standards”. URF ratings are used for “conventional honey” and are expressed in values ranging from 20-100 through to 250+.

CY2025 more than doubled from year-before levels to 27.9 tonnes (NZD1.4m).

With seesaw annual volumes ranging from 20,000 - 30,000 tonnes, Romania is the EC’s largest honey producer. It may seem an unlikely prospect as a growth market, given modest per-capita income of about USD22,000, but it is nonetheless a substantial honey importer as well as exporter.

And in a market where major producers such as Apidava and Rom Honey Group already promote a range of honeys for their health benefits, mānuka may be welcomed as more complementary than competitive. It should also have become more affordable, considering import duty on mānuka has reduced to zero under the EU-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement. (The staged reduction to zero for non-mānuka types should complete next year.)

Apidava and Rom Honey Group seem to have learned some trade tricks from New Zealand. Apidava advertises honey rated “Enzyme Activity +10” and Rom Honey Group more boldly has trademarked URM, which abbreviates “Unique Romanian Factor”.

Note: Report tables by the author; maps by Gemini.

Bruce Roscoe is a Japan-resident researcher and former foreign correspondent and securities analyst. He has visited South Korea several times for research purposes and worked in Saudi Arabia (Jeddah and Yanbu on the Red Sea coast) for 18 months. 🐝

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Queen Breeders Feature



It's fast getting to that time of year again, when hives are being opened for the first time coming out of winter – a winter featuring New Zealand's warmest June on record. Many beekeeping tasks await in the next few months, but prime among them is ensuring the queen at the heart of each colony is fit to perform.

With that in mind, we thought it prudent to take this time in late-winter/early spring to create a space where those at the helm of some of New Zealand's leading breeding programmes can provide further details to inform what each of their businesses is about. We ran an equivalent feature in 2024 and figure every second year is prudent timing to keep the industry abreast of the leading queen breeding businesses serving beekeepers.

Whether it is the biology and mechanics of the breeding programmes themselves, the people calling the shots, or what's on offer, it's all good information for beekeepers to consider if they are 'in the market' for queens, cells, or nucs.

Come spring there can be a lot of people looking to sell queens, all of varying levels of dedication, skill, experience and expertise. So, we hope this feature can help potential buyers make informed choices around what they are getting from a breeding programme, and who they are dealing with.

Afterall, successful beekeeping is not just about getting the hive queen-right, but with the right queen for your needs.

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QUEEN BEE

Year Colors



Blue	White	Yellow	Red	Green
Years ending in 0 or 5	Years ending in 1 or 6	Years ending in 2 or 7	Years ending in 3 or 8	Years ending in 4 or 9

Like most things beekeeping, beekeepers tend to have their own thoughts on what colour queens should be marked in a New Zealand season which spans two calendar years, but 2026 represents a "white" year in the international queen bee colour code.

Thoughts,
feelings or
other input
you'd like
to share?

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Mana Queen

MARLBOROUGH

Mana Queen was shaped by decades of beekeeping experience across different climates, islands and continents.

Founder Raf Augustyn graduated from the Secondary Technical School of Apiculture in Poland, the only specialist school of its kind in Europe, earning the official state title of Technician Beekeeper after four years of technical education. His beekeeping career now spans 25 years across Europe, North America, Asia and Oceania.

His experience covers continental, northern, tropical, subtropical and maritime conditions, as well as island environments including Great Britain, Hawaii, New Zealand's North and South Islands, Matakana Island, and now Arapaoa Island.

In New Zealand, he worked across Northland, Wairarapa, Waikato, Marlborough and the Sounds, establishing three operations from the ground up: a queen unit within Kiwi Bee's Waikato honey business, King Honey's combined Marlborough honey and queen operation, and finally Mana Queen, focused primarily on queen breeding alongside a premium certified organic honey operation.

Mana Queen carries around 1,000 mating nucs through winter and expands to 2,500 units at the height of the season. A further 100 certified organic production hives form the drone-stock foundation of the breeding programme. This scale supports commercial production while maintaining a large population for ongoing breeder selection.

The operation supplies queen cells and mated queens throughout New Zealand. The programme is focused on steadily improving disease resistance and mite tolerance with each generation. The strongest breeder queens are retained within the population, while other outstanding breeder-class queens are made available to the wider industry.

Export queens are produced during the second half of the season, with Canada currently the principal market. As overseas interest grows, Mana Queen is working to develop further pathways for New Zealand queens into international markets.

Breeder selection begins with a large, genetically diverse population of overwintered queens. The wider the testing base, the better the chance of finding individuals that stand clearly above the average while preserving the diversity needed for future progress. Each queen has already demonstrated her ability to overwinter and is then evaluated for performance before the next generation is selected. This annual cycle of testing, comparison and selection is demanding, but it provides the depth needed to make genuine progress without narrowing the population too quickly.

The objective is not simply to produce more queens. It is to improve the population first within Mana Queen, then carry that progress into commercial operations through queens, queen cells and the drones their colonies produce.

Mana Queen uses a layered testing programme rather than relying on one trait. Pin testing provides an initial screen for hygienic behaviour. VSH is assessed through the Harbo assay, which measures the proportion of non-reproductive mites in infested brood, while UbeeO uses synthetic unhealthy-brood odours to measure a colony's targeted hygienic response to varroa-affected brood. Uncapping and recapping behaviour is also recorded during spring evaluations.

These results are tested against the field outcome that matters most: mite population growth. Repeated mite washes show which colonies consistently slow mite increase under comparable conditions. A separate collaborative project, VarroaSense, is now focused on making this testing more

standardised, efficient and practical at commercial scale.

Production queens are primarily mated within the Richmond Ranges of Marlborough, where the surrounding valleys support established drone congregation areas. Selected drone colonies are positioned strategically to strengthen their contribution to those areas, although mainland matings will always include some influence from surrounding operations. Arapaoa Island offers a greater level of reproductive control. Its geographic isolation allows distinct maternal and paternal lines to be managed in separate breeding groups, creating more deliberate mating combinations and accelerating progress across the wider population.

Organic management underpins the entire breeding system. The certified scope covers designated drone-source colonies and selected breeding groups on Arapaoa Island, while the wider operation follows the same organic principles. Synthetic miticides are excluded from every stage of queen production, allowing Mana Queen to maintain a clean rearing environment for uncompromised reproductive stock.

Continuous improvement sits at the centre of Mana Queen's breeding philosophy, with each generation building on the performance of the last. The aim is to keep making measurable progress towards queens that combine commercial performance with stronger disease resistance and slower mite population growth. By applying that progress first within its own breeding programme, then distributing it through queen cells, mated queens and breeder stock, Mana Queen intends to contribute to a more resilient future for New Zealand beekeeping.

MANA



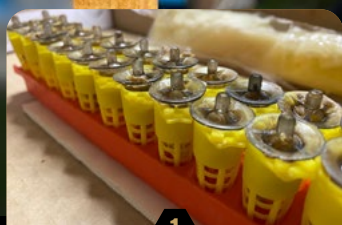
QUEEN

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QUEEN CELLS

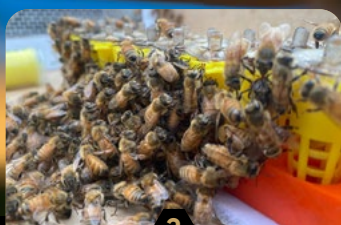
Naturally finished queen cells, incubated by the colony through to day 14 for robust cells, consistency and reliable emergence.



1

CELLS PROTECTED

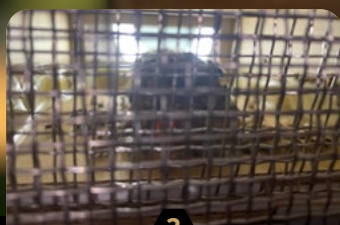
Queen cells are secured in JZ-BZ cell protectors.



2

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3

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Chatham Gold

CHATHAM ISLANDS

From the Chatham Islands a new type of queen is coming to New Zealand, one bred 44° south in isolation.

For many years, Toni Croon of Chatham Gold has quietly worked with her bees in one of New Zealand's most remote and remarkable places, the Chatham Islands, and now she is sharing them with the rest of New Zealand.

Toni has strategically placed all her hives in carefully selected locations across the island, giving her bees' access to the very best of this unique disease-free, wasp-free environment.

In many ways it's a charmed life, varroa-free, American foulbrood-free and wasp-free.

"It's embarrassingly easy to be a beekeeper," Toni says "as long as the bees face north, sheltered from south west winds they flourish."

Over the years, Toni has come to know her bees, her hives and the lay of the land. Her passion and dedication can be tasted in Chatham Gold's clover honey. Toni has hives in Peat Wetlands which are producing her Heather Honey. But for Toni, the journey has never been just about honey.

The business is beginning a new chapter, having established a large new bee shed and home, she is ready to turn her attention to the exporting of queens, nucs and package bees which are all transported to New Zealand via a four-hour air-freight to Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

The Italian-type bees are grafted on performance because behind every strong hive is a strong queen.

From a tiny island something special is taking flight.

"Isolation has its downfall but, when it comes to bees, being 800km east of New Zealand has been a God send," Toni says.





THE NEW QUEEN IS COMING

MATED QUEENS - PACKAGED BEES - NUCS



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Chatham
Gold



ApiLife Ltd

WAIRARAPA

At ApiLife the mission is simple: To provide superior honey bee genetics for future generations. Of course, any beekeeper knows that achieving such gains is anything but simple, but owner Jaime McRae says they are committed to the task and dedicated to working alongside beekeepers to make it happen.

"That starts with breeding both *Apis mellifera ligustica* (Italian honey bee) and *Apis mellifera carnica* (Carniolan honey bee)," McRae explains.

"This gives us an advantage over most queen suppliers who only choose to supply either Italian queens or Carniolan queens. We have invested a vast amount of time and funding in sourcing queens from breeders all over New Zealand and we monitor these queens over a full one-year period before we introduce any new genetics to our pools. We look for genetic diversities we can include in our genetic lines, including production and hygienic behaviour traits, temperament, vigour, winter survival rate, Varroa Sensitive Hygiene (VSH) traits, and reduced swarming behaviour."

NEW ADDITIONS

The family owned and operated beekeeping company, located in the lower North Island, mixes commercial beekeeping experience with a scientific approach. This has included introducing artificial insemination to the breeding programme in an attempt to enhance and speed up genetic gains.

"A key consideration in ApiLife's queen selection is increasingly varroa tolerance and hygienic traits. Therefore, both the Harbro assay and UBeeO testing is being utilised to allow selection of genetic traits which improve the overall health and resilience of the honey bee population," McRae says.

ASSESSING THE RESULTS

Careful assessment is made of every queen before it enters the cage at ApiLife and queens are also left in their hives for a minimum of one month before being caged and sent to customers.

"This ensures that the queen is performing well, allows enough time to highlight any potential issues that an individual queen may have, and allows time for her to produce the

right level of the five known pheromones," McRae says.

"These pheromones play a crucial part of requeening. If the queen lacks certain amounts of each pheromone the hive may not accept her in to the new colony."

ENCOURAGING OTHERS

With the mission to improve honey bee genetics for future generations, ApiLife also supplies Artificial Insemination equipment to fellow beekeepers should they wish to utilise the technique themselves.

As spring approaches, McRae advises beekeepers to get a plan for the coming season and their queen supply in place early. ApiLife have sold out of over-wintered queens already, and even the early spring rounds, but there is still space later in the season.

"We are gearing up for another full-on production season and there is still opportunity for mated queen orders in the new year and even for those who want to register interest for the following season. I look forward to hearing from beekeepers."



Another frame of healthy capped brood from an ApiLife queen, an essential requirement before they enter the cage and head out to beekeepers.



Focused queen breeding and proven genetics for commercial and hobbyist beekeepers across New Zealand

Apis mellifera ligustica (Italian honey bee) + *Apis mellifera carnica* (Carniolan honey bee) – with variety comes advantage.

2026 SEASON PRICES

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Summer/ Autumn Mated Queens	\$55 +GST
Artificially Inseminated Queens	\$800–\$1200 +GST (Limited Availability)
Virgins	\$12 +GST
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Lion Apiaries

AUCKLAND

For almost 20 years Lion Apiaries have been serving New Zealand beekeepers, and because they're commercial beekeepers, they understand that buying queens isn't simply placing an order – it's part of a season that's constantly changing.

While they carefully select the queens they breed from, owner Dallas Russ says they also recognise that open-mated queen production is about balancing selection with maintaining the genetic diversity needed for healthy, productive colonies.

"Producing quality queens at commercial scale isn't about chasing the narrowest genetic line, it's about consistently producing queens that perform well for beekeepers season after season," Russ says.

"The queens we select are the ones that prove themselves where it matters: they establish quickly, build strong colonies, remain pleasant to work, and keep performing through the pressures of a commercial season. Those practical traits guide every breeding decision we make."

The Lion Apiaries queen production programme has grown over many years and now operates thousands of mating units each season. Managing a programme at that scale requires careful attention to both queen quality and genetic diversity, ensuring reliable queens continue to be produced without compromising the long-term strength of stock.

"Just as important to us as the queens themselves is the service behind them," Russ explains.

"Beekeeping rarely goes exactly to plan. Weather changes, honey flows shift, pollination contracts move, and suddenly the number of queens you need isn't the number you ordered. We understand that because we live it too. Wherever possible, we'll work with you to adjust your order and help you make the season work."

At Lion Apiaries the mantra is not to simply supply queens, but support fellow beekeepers.

"Whether you're managing thousands of hives or buying your first few queens, our

aim is the same: to provide honest advice, dependable service, and quality queens you can buy with confidence.

"We believe good queens are the result of consistent selection, sound management, and experience, not exaggerated claims. We also believe good business is built on relationships. We're here to serve New Zealand beekeepers, and we'd be honoured to be part of your next season."



Lion Apiaries owners Sara and Dallas Russ.

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Calm, Well Behaved Bees



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Kereru Queen Bees Ltd

HAWKE'S BAY

Nestled in the foothills of the Ruahine Ranges, three sisters and their families operate Kereru Queen Bees – a queen breeding programme that has been AFB free for over 40 years.

Their Bee Team manages 1000 hives in Kereru, rural Hawke's Bay, including over 100 specialised breeders and cell raisers. Breeder queens are selected for desirable traits such as top honey production, hygienic behaviour, friendly temperament, pollen collection and overwintering success.

"We have been advancing these genetics even further by evaluating our best queens for Varroa Sensitive Hygiene using methods refined by Rae Butler," says apiary manager Amy Dunn.

"It is exciting to see positive results and we consider the time and effort it takes to complete the VSH testing worth the investment."

Their long-term goal is to breed bees that are more resistant to varroa, thus reducing the number of mite treatments needed. The majority of their hives are now organic.

Before grafting, larvae are assessed for optimal age and royal jelly, and before sale every cell is checked for virgin size and quality. Large mating nucs are used in which each queen can lay up to 9 standard $\frac{3}{4}$ depth brood frames. Quality is paramount, hence why queens are left in their hives for at least four weeks so their capped brood can be examined before sale.

"We prefer using larger nucs," Amy explains, "because we can more accurately assess laying patterns, brood quality and hive health. We use supers on our mating nucs so excess honey can be harvested, while also leaving good stores for them to overwinter strongly."

Building upon the legacy of their father John Dobson – creator and manufacturer of

the iconic Carricell portable incubator – the sustainability of Kereru Queen Bees Ltd stems from the high quality of their queens, customer satisfaction and word of mouth.

"I think word has gotten around that we focus more on quality than quantity so many of our clients are booking 1-2 years in advance!" says Amy.

As such all their overwintered queens for this spring are fully booked with a waiting list. They still have some availability for later spring and summer mated queens, and queen cells (available from early September through until end of March).



Apiary Manager Amy Dunn harvesting cells in rural Hawke's Bay.



Kereru Queen Bees Ltd

Producing Quality Italian & Hybrid

*** Queen Cells ***

*** Overwintered Queens ***

*** Spring & Summer Mated Queens ***

*** 4 Frame $\frac{3}{4}$ Depth Nucleus Hives ***



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Kiwi Queens

TASMAN

Growth through the acquisition of fellow beekeeping enterprises has brought more than just additional hives to the Goldsworthy Apiaries operation. It has also expanded the genetic diversity available to the Kiwi Queens breeding programme in the Tasman region.

"There is no shortage of new genetics to choose from in our wider operations, which provides robust and high-quality bees," says owner Matthew Goldsworthy.

Kiwi Queens operates as a specialist breeding arm of the wider Goldsworthy Apiaries business, which Matthew and Sarah Goldsworthy have steadily expanded across the upper South Island through the acquisition of several beekeeping operations in recent years.

The breeding programme focuses on Italian-style queens – "the more pure, the more golden, the better" – with high

honey production, calm temperament and strong overall performance forming the key selection criteria. Kiwi Queens supplies mated queens, virgin queens and nucleus colonies to beekeepers throughout New Zealand.

While Goldsworthy Apiaries hives are spread from the West Coast through Tasman and Nelson to Marlborough, the centre of the Kiwi Queens breeding programme remains in Tasman, where the operation's best-performing colonies are relocated.

"We select our top three or four percent of hives and they don't all become our breeders, but we bring them in to be our cell-raising finishers. That allows us to look through them more often and harness the genetics to raise the cells and create good healthy bees and quality queens," Goldsworthy explains.

The business also benefits from isolated mating locations situated within forestry blocks, helping maintain strong control over

drone populations and breeding outcomes.

Virgin queens are supplied to some customers and are also used internally when queen cells are not utilised in time. Goldsworthy says the approach has delivered strong success rates. Nucleus colony production is another important part of the Kiwi Queens operation.

"The nucs are generally summer-mated and we set them up through the honey flow and carry them over winter. The season is then so early over here that we can supply good nucs in August and early September – three frames of brood and five of bees. Good, solid, strong early units."

Since launching in 2020, Kiwi Queens has grown to supply thousands of queens to beekeepers around the country. With demand continuing, Goldsworthy sees further opportunities for expansion.

"We are excited about the potential growth of the industry and we want to grow with it, so that will mean increasing our queen supply and our nuc supply."



KIWI QUEENS

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QUALITY ITALIAN QUEENS

Nelson Based Queen Breeding Program

PRICING 2026

Overwintered Queens	SOLD OUT Delivery August/September
Spring Mated Queens	\$55.00 (20+ queens per order) \$60.00 (under 20 queens) September-December
Autumn Mated Queens	\$50.00 January-March
5 Frame NUCS	\$250 + GST and delivery All year round



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Delivery approx. \$15.00 per box of queens



Matt Goldsworthy
kiwiQueens@hotmail.com
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Bee Smart Breeding

ASHBURTON

At Bee Smart Breeding Rae Butler taglines her breeding programme “the right direction”. That’s because it leads the way in breeding bees for Varroa Sensitive Hygiene (VSH), combining varroa resistant breeding with maintaining the sort of traits commercial beekeepers value – honey production, overwintering ability, temperament and colony health.

The Bee Smart Breeding programme collaborates with a Canterbury beekeeper with more 1,000 colonies which are screened for VSH and selectively bred through open mating. The ten-year program has consistently achieved honey yields with minimal winter losses, while requiring only two annual varroa treatments.

A range of varroa resistant queens of various grades are available, dependent on VSH level, seasonality and source and what

other services from Bee Smart Breeding are required.

And it is these other services that further set Bee Smart Breeding apart. Butler has trained under some of the world’s leading VSH experts and spent 15 years on the task of breeding for varroa resistance. Now it is not simply a matter of sharing those genetics through sales of mated and virgin queens, plus queen cells, but helping promote genetic improvement by providing education and services to assist.

“The aim is to encourage beekeepers to work alongside their queen breeders to identify varroa-resistant colonies within their own apiaries and breed from them. Whether through open-mating, drone saturation, isolated mating or instrumental insemination, breeding systems can be tailored to suit individual operations,” Butler explains.

“As more beekeepers select for these traits, favourable genetics become increasingly common within local drone populations, strengthening future generations of bees while maintaining genetic diversity.”

Bee Smart Breeding supports this journey through VSH-tested breeder queens, production queens and queen cells, Harbo VSH assaying, instrumental insemination, semen collection, breeding programme development, consulting and training. Services are available on-site, at the Ashburton facility, or through brood frames and bee samples submitted for assessment.

Currently in the midst of leading a winter tour of workshops titled “Breeding for Varroa Resistance” hosted by the Bee Breeding NZ Group which she founded, Butler is putting in the work to not only advance the VSH genetic profile of her own Bee Smart Breeding stock, but across the country.

“Working together, we can build healthier, more resilient bee populations and help shape a sustainable future for New Zealand beekeeping,” she says.

That’s why it’s the right direction.

QUEENS, TRAINING, AND SUPPORT TO HELP BEEKEEPERS ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN VARROA-RESISTANT STOCK

QUEENS

A range of varroa resistant queens of various grades are available, dependent on VSH level, seasonality and source.

VSH HARBO TEST TRAINING

Learn to screen for VSH in your own bee population or evaluate outsourced stock with this in-depth learning experience.

VSH TESTING SERVICE

Bee Smart Breeding will screen your bees for VSH if you prefer not to do this yourself.

WORKSHOPS

Gain an overview of varroa resistance, VSH mechanisms, and the Harbo Test. Ideal for beekeepers purchasing varroa-resistant queens to understand your investment.

QUEENS

VSH DAUGHTERS

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Queen Cells	\$10 - \$35
Inseminated Queens	\$380+

VSH SCORED BREEDERS

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Instrumentally Inseminated Queens

Drone Semen

SERVICES

A full range of services and training customised to your needs are available by negotiation.

VSH HARBO TESTS & TRAINING

Ashburton Testing	\$55- \$75 per colony
Onsite Testing	Hourly rate & travel
Onsite Training	Hourly rate & travel

WORKSHOPS

Ashburton	Group rates
Onsite	Group rate & travel



Bee Smart Breeding

027 430 1106 | runny.honey@xtra.co.nz
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Seaton Valley Queen Bees

NELSON

At Seaton Valley Queen Bees owner Matt Davidson says 100% of their focus is on providing queen bees for fellow beekeepers, and that sets them apart. "We always deliver what we say we are going to deliver. That's our ethos," Davidson says.

"Some queen breeders use their mated queens within their own operations, to support pollination or honey production efforts, but not us. Our focus is on breeding queens to get out the door to our clients who need them," Davidson says.

The settled weather of the Upper Moutere, west of Nelson, provides an ideal environment and Seaton Valley Queen Bees regularly achieve an 80% queen mating success rate Davidson says, thus supporting their reliability to deliver.

His dedication to the craft of queen breeding is not new either, having trained for four years from the age of 16 before taking over the hives himself over three decades ago. The owner keeps a close eye on every mated queen caged, with he and one employee of 10 years' experience carrying out the work.

"I see every queen which goes into a cage and I assess the quality of the laying patterns, so when beekeepers place an order with us they know they will get reliability."

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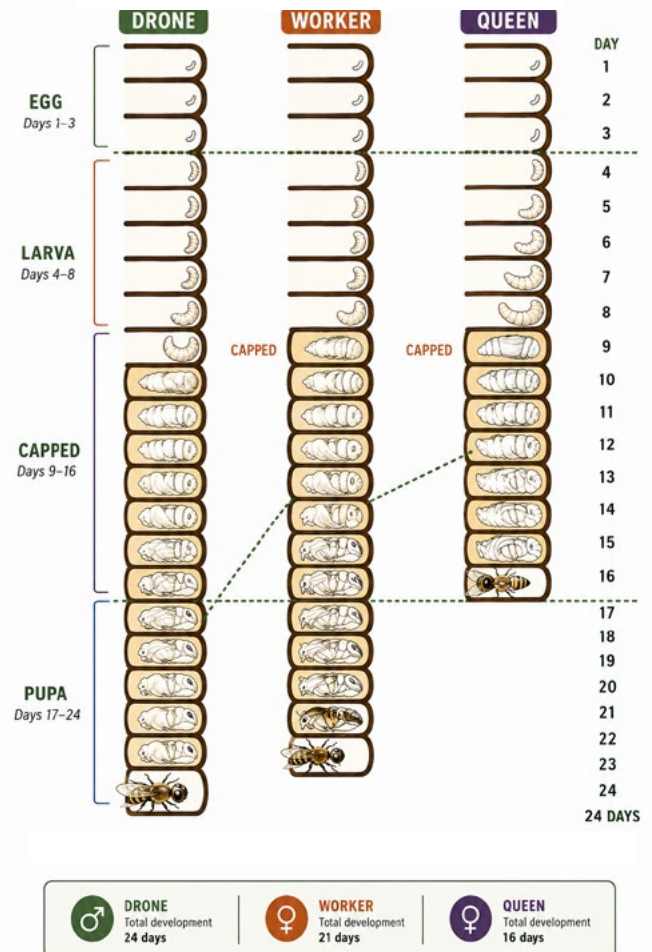
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Pyramid Apiaries

MARLBOROUGH

Performance, Reliability and Commitment are the three qualities that drive Pyramid Apiaries breeding programme in Marlborough, supplying mated queens throughout New Zealand, queen cells for local pickup and nucs for whoever needs them.

PERFORMANCE

Performance of queens is key, with selection of breeding queens coming from the top performing honey producers which then over-winter strongly. Like most breeding programmes, hives with poor temperament are ruled out. Italian-type bees are sought by selecting on colour where possible, such as ruling out hives with a high proportion of black drones. However, attributes that are more likely to boost productivity are prioritised over colour.

"The laying ability of our mated queens is also closely assessed, with all of our queens mated in full-depth units which provide good opportunity to evaluate their production

ability before being caged and supplied to beekeepers," owner Laura Dawkins says.

RELIABILITY

Pyramid Apiaries' goal is not to be the biggest supplier of queens or nucs to the industry, but the most reliable.

"We work with some regular core clients to provide them with queens, cells or nucs and we really enjoy effectively being their business's queen breeding unit. We take this job seriously, doing our best to supply orders when the beekeepers need them. Communication is key, and understanding and working in with our fellow beekeepers is hugely motivating for us," Dawkins says.

COMMITMENT

Pyramid Apiaries work is almost all carried out by husband-and-wife owners Patrick and Laura, with casual staff, albeit skilled and experienced, used only infrequently.

"We find the whole process of running a breeding programme enjoyable, so are

committed to ensuring the end results – the queens, the cells, the nucs – are top-notch."

While many of the Pyramid mated queens are booked out in spring, there is still opportunity for beekeepers to snap some up in late spring and through summer, if they preorder. Nucs are also selling fast, so beekeepers are advised to get in quick and make plans for future orders too.

"We have a core group we supply, but also really enjoy talking with any new beekeepers to see if the queens or hives we have on offer suit their needs," Dawkins says, adding "those beekeepers should reach out – we would love to have that conversation."



Pyramid Apiaries

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Hornet Champions — Why the Fight Isn't Over Yet



BY ELOISE MARTYN

While yellow-legged hornets have disappeared from sight for winter, New Zealand's response isn't over yet. Biosecurity New Zealand and the bee sector are now turning their attention to keeping awareness alive, launching a proposed Hornet Champions network to help ensure vigilance doesn't fade before eradication can be declared.

The initiative, modelled on the UK's successful Hornet Action Groups, aims to recruit respected beekeepers to act as local champions, sharing accurate information, encouraging reporting and helping prepare communities should hornets reappear. It is a timely reminder that eradication requires more than finding and destroying nests – it relies on people remaining alert for years.

The exact nature of what the proposed Hornet Champions' work would entail and who would be appointed to such roles is yet to be confirmed, but Biosecurity New Zealand is keen to get the beekeeping community's thoughts on the approach.

The concept was reinforced during a recent Auckland Beekeepers Club webinar, attended online by 33 participants, featuring UK bee health specialist and beekeeper Dan Etheridge. Etheridge spent more than a decade with the UK's National Bee Unit (NBU), where he played a key role in the country's response to the yellow-legged hornet (commonly known in the UK as the Asian hornet). He also travelled to New Zealand to assist field teams during Auckland's recent yellow-legged hornet response.

One message stood out clearly: beekeepers are among the most valuable tools in the response.

"Beekeepers have been invaluable," Etheridge said, describing how UK beekeepers report sightings, monitor bait stations, trap hornets and raise awareness through schools, garden clubs and community groups. Their involvement has become an essential part of UK's long-running response.

The UK's system receives around 20,000 public reports each year. Suspected sightings are assessed before specialist field teams track hornets back to their nests, with separate teams responsible for destroying them. Tree surgeons have also become indispensable, with many nests located more than 20 metres high in mature trees.

Technology has transformed the response since the first hornets arrived in Britain in 2016. Etheridge highlighted an impressive technological toolbox that includes ArcGIS a complex mapping system, Dutch-developed radio trackers, and Artificial Intelligence-powered camera systems capable of automatically detecting hornets. However, he was quick to emphasise that technology tools are supplementary, rather than a replacement, for the fundamental methods of locating, tracking and eliminating hornet nests.

"The primary method is still baiting, timing and triangulation," he explained. Inspectors capture hornets, mark them and carefully

25/26 SURVEILLANCE RESULTS

Detections and nests destroyed supporting eradication objectives.



77
QUEENS



1,090
MALES



3,479
WORKERS



132
NESTS
DESTROYED

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY AT PEAK SCALE



~2300
TRAPS DEPLOYED
57,000+
TRAPS CHECKED



100+
FIELD STAFF
DEPLOYED
DAILY



8,300+
GROUND
SURVEYS
Completed between
Nov 25 - Jan 26



11,951
VESPEX
STATIONS
DEPLOYED

PUBLIC AWARENESS & ENGAGEMENT



400+
APIARIES
MONITORED



2,900+
VISITS
SUPPORTED BY
BEEKEEPERS



17,900+
PUBLIC
NOTIFICATIONS



115,000+
WEBSITE
VISITS



344,000+
DIGITAL
BILLBOARD
IMPRESSIONS



98,000+
HOUSEHOLDS
MAILED
To engage
community in
high-risk areas



650,000+
VIEWS
On a post
highlighting
Robor tracking
technology



ENGAGEMENT
FROM ACROSS
THE MOTU



record their flight direction and return times, gradually narrowing the search area until the nest is found. Even gluing a tiny strand of glittering party tinsel to a hornet has proved surprisingly effective for keeping insects visible during tracking.

Despite the impressive technology, Etheridge repeatedly returned to the importance of teamwork, persistence and community involvement.

There was encouraging news for New Zealand too.

Asked whether yellow-legged hornets could be eradicated here, Etheridge didn't hesitate.

"I think the short answer is 'yes'," he said. "You've already shown you're in a good position to do so. It's a completely different situation to the UK."

He praised Biosecurity New Zealand and SPS Biota's response as "outstanding", saying the speed with which nests had been located had given New Zealand a significant advantage. He also noted a key difference between the UK and New Zealand. While some yellow-legged hornet nests are found in residential areas in the UK, the majority are located in the rural countryside with relatively little surrounding development. In contrast, Auckland's landscape of interconnected urban parks, reserves and residential, where hornets were found, presented a different set of surveillance and response challenges. He was particularly struck by Auckland's high concentration of nests, with many found close together despite most nests being small and weak.

Etheridge warned, however, that winter should not breed complacency. Based on temperatures and daylight hours, he

expects hornet queens could begin emerging from mid to late September. His advice to beekeepers is simple: watch for the first common wasp queens.

"As soon as I see common wasp queens emerge, I know the hornets aren't far behind."

The complacency message aligns perfectly with the proposed Hornet Champions programme. The proposed programme is seeking respected beekeepers from around New Zealand to act as local Hornet Champions. Their role will be to share accurate information, encourage reporting, help keep awareness high within local clubs and communities, and support preparedness should yellow-legged hornets be detected again. Beekeepers are also encouraged to have their say on the proposed guidelines and nominate suitable champions in their region.

With 77 queens and 132 nests removed and no confirmed detections since early April, New Zealand has made extraordinary progress. But confirming eradication requires two consecutive seasons with no hornets detected.

The next phase of the response will depend less on field crews and more on informed, connected communities. If the Hornet Champions initiative succeeds in keeping awareness high, it may prove just as important as any piece of tracking equipment in securing New Zealand's victory over the yellow-legged hornet.

Registered beekeepers should have received an email from New Zealand Bee Health and Biosecurity regarding Hornet Champions on July 22. More information can be obtained by emailing

info@nzbb.org.nz. 🐝

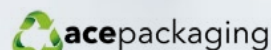
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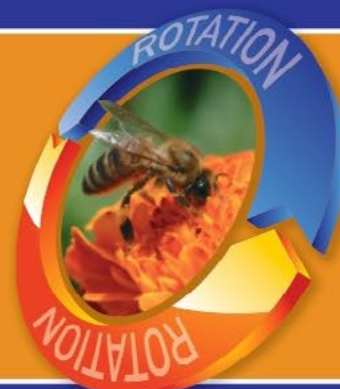
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Looking to India, “and Taking Our People and Place With Us”



Blanche Murray is the founder and director of Kai Ora Honey, a beekeeping and honey exporting business based in Awanui in the far North, and a director to Te Pitau Ltd, the operating arm of the Mānuka Charitable Trust. With a free trade agreement (FTA) with India signed and soon to be in force, she fields questions on a currently tiny, but potentially huge, market for mānuka honey.

Apiarist's Advocate: Kia ora Blanche, thanks for taking the time to answer some questions for us. I say 'kia ora' intentionally, rather than 'hello' – your business is named Kai Ora, you proudly represent your Māori heritage through it, as well as your work with Te Pitau, and you even sat on the Māori panel for mānuka to help get the India FTA over the line.

Blanche Murray: Kia ora. I did and that was an insightful experience. Despite being oceans apart there are some similarities between Māori culture and traditional Indian culture, which could assist our entry to the market with mānuka honey – and a free trade deal helps too!

AA: Indeed, and the FTA is expected to take force by, at latest, April 2027. So, is Kai Ora Honey considering the Indian market?

The short answer, yes. India's middle class is already 430-million-plus people and on track to pass 700 million by 2031. That's households earning roughly NZD9,000 to 54,000 a year, with

incomes climbing and real demand for premium natural health products.

There's a catch though – it only works as value-add. We're not shipping commodity honey into a country that produces plenty of its own. But India doesn't need convincing that honey is medicine. Their traditional medicine, known as Ayurveda, has been saying it for thousands of years. Honey as rongoā is already how they think. Our values aligned before we ever showed up together.

AA: How would that compare to other markets, in your experience?

We export to Japan, Canada, Romania and the UAE, and each market taught us something. India is different because we're not introducing honey – we're introducing *our* honey. So, we lead with People and Place, not lab numbers: our whānau, our whenua in Te Hiku, kaitiakitanga of the bee. Family, land, tradition – India gets that.



AA: The world's highest population, nearly 1.5 billion people, and a global top five economy. Is it intimidating?

Yes, of course. It's massive and layered – different regions, languages, channels, price points. But that's not a reason to sit it out, it's a reason to do the homework. That's where we are: building relationships, learning the regulations, positioning properly before we push.

Blanche Murray, founder and director of Kai Ora Honey and director of Te Pitau, says the potential of the India honey market is only as a "value add" but "India doesn't need convincing that honey is medicine ... our values aligned before we ever showed up together".

AA: What should exporters be wary of, and how should we approach it as an industry?

The trap is the race to the bottom. India produces over 150,000 tonnes of honey a year at prices we'll never match – and shouldn't try to. The FTA has our back: it's the first time India has given any country preferential access for honey. Tariffs on mānuka drop 75 percent over five years, and the cut only applies to premium honey. It's built to reward value-add, not volume.

I saw why up close, as part of the Māori Panel for Mānuka during the negotiations. Honey was a difficult hurdle to get included – far from a given. What moved the dial was authenticity: who we are as New Zealand, our culture and history, and the Māori connection to mānuka.

That mahi continues through Te Pītau Limited, the operational arm of the Mānuka Charitable Trust, where I serve as a director – protecting the distinctiveness, mātauranga and cultural history of mānuka through a certification trademark, building toward a geographic indicator, or GI.

New Zealand currently exports India only a relatively miniscule seven tonnes of honey a year. The headroom is enormous — if we walk in together and don't undercut each other at the door. Structures get you to the door; relationships get you inside. And we're lucky to have partners like Mallika Janakiraman, an excellent trade consultant, passionate about the connections, and authentic protections.

AA: You mention that elusive term "GI". New Zealand is yet to earn a geographic indicator for mānuka honey in any market. Are they a pipe dream, or worth chasing?

GIs are no niche idea: they've protected communities and their craft for generations. Frameworks for them are growing across the EU, Asia and Africa and, after completing GI training in Espelette, France in 2024, I've seen first-hand how the GI framework grows and protects a product and place in market.

GI's grow other eco-systems too, such as tourism. We have even hosted wahine from Espelette here in Ahipara.

Some here still don't see the value in a GI. India does. We'd be fools not to take note.

AA: Kai Ora has been spotted on social media welcoming Indian visitors to the business. How strong are these connections?

In June we hosted Nimit Singh of Madhumakhiwala, a sustainable beekeeping and honey enterprise in India, here with the Asia New Zealand Foundation. We took him into our ngahere planted trees and visited hives in Te Hiku, and the overlap was uncanny – beekeeper livelihoods, bee conservation, rural communities. His kaupapa is our kaupapa. We're now talking long-term: not just selling mānuka into India, but working alongside local beekeepers, learning both ways, and looking after the bee.

Then in July I was in the room when Prime Minister Luxon hosted Prime Minister Modi in Auckland, and you could feel the relationship shifting gear. The door to India is opening. Our job is to walk through it well – and take our people and our place with us. 🐝



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New Podcast with NZ Beeswax GM Discusses Hot Topics

General manager of leading supply company to beekeepers, New Zealand Beeswax, Nick Taylor recently sat down with *Apiarist's Advocate* editor Patrick Dawkins as the first-ever in-person guest on the *Apiarist's Advocate Pod* podcast. Topics discussed were as diverse as bee gut health, varroa control methods, recycling of plastic frames, Australian varroa problems and even the new industry body – here's some of the highlights.

"It's been a roller coaster of a winter so far," Taylor began the podcast by saying, pointing to New Zealand's warmest June on record, followed by a stormy front sweeping the country in July.

"What does that mean for the bees and for bee health and for varroa levels? Only time will tell. Potentially, it's just a short-term blip and it won't have much of an effect. But potentially, it's a trigger for a bit of a snowball coming towards people in the spring ... what we do know is the conditions later in spring, August, September, they probably have more of an effect on varroa levels, causing them to start building earlier and really ramp up early, which can catch people out."

NZ Beeswax is the supplier of Apivar, which offers a '10 week halo of protection' thanks to active-ingredient amitraz. Taylor pointed out amitraz is by far commercial beekeepers' most popular varroa control treatment as per the latest Colony Loss Survey results. Despite the warm weather through June, NZ Beeswax has not seen an increased push in demand for the leading product. Overall though, Taylor reports sentiment is noticeably higher among beekeepers following improved honey pricing last season.

When it comes to varroa control, Taylor matches the results of the Colony Loss Survey with what he has learned from extensive travel around the world to beekeeping events in recent years.

"... Beekeepers are using more than one active [varroa treatment] over a 12-month period. They're usually choosing at least two, but often three or four or even five different actives throughout the year. And globally, that's absolutely best practice."

GUT HEALTH GAME CHANGER

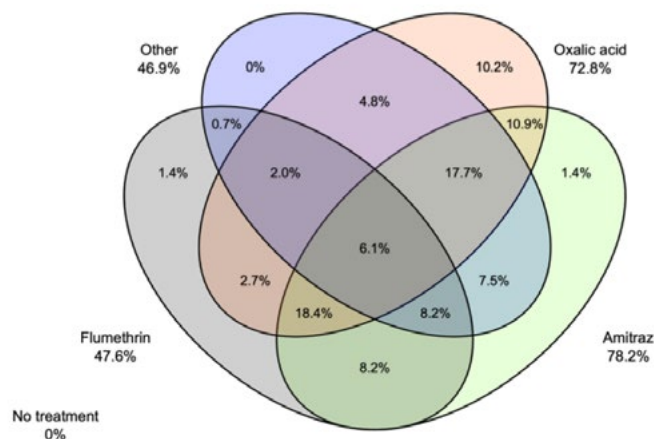
Another pressing topic around the world at beekeeping events is honey bee "microbiota" Taylor told the podcast.

"Essentially, it's gut health of the bees. And there's been a lot of research ... it's accelerated in the last decade. And it's about understanding the 12-month cycle of bees going through the environment, going through their beekeeping journey over 12 months and how the interaction with the environment is affecting their gut health. That could be adverse weather, poor nutrition, pesticide exposure, or the effects of migratory beekeeping, transportation."



Nick Taylor, GM NZ Beeswax, recently joined *Apiarist's Advocate Pod* podcast to talk some of the most pressing points in Kiwi beekeeping.

Varroa treatment 50+ colonies



The most recent Colony Loss Survey confirmed amitraz, the active ingredient in Apivar, as the most popular varroa control method used by Kiwi beekeepers.

Taylor points to some of New Zealand beekeepers' requirements for pollination where hive health and bee microbiota is put under stress, plus the stresses associated with some manuka honey sites and transportation, as times when assisting with bees' microbiota could go a long way.

The solution, Taylor advises is a new product from Vetopharma called Bactobee.

"It's a beneficial probiotic. One thing that's unique about it is that it's live. So it's a live probiotic... Essentially, it's five grams, a teaspoon that you sprinkle across the top bars. The reason that you have to do it like that is to preserve the live probiotic. If you add it to sugar syrup, that can potentially kill it. If you add it to a protein patty, the acidified citric acid, for example, that are in those protein patties can kill the bacteria as well. So feed it live and on a top bar and it's consumed pretty quickly."

It's a tool to help beehives bounce back from what would otherwise be "pain points" in their seasonal demands Taylor says, so they can be productive for whatever is next.

THE MILLION DOLLAR WATERBLASTER

From bee health, the podcast turned to an increasingly important service offering from NZ Beeswax – "we affectionally call it the million dollar water blaster" Taylor said. That being their plastic frame wash, and wax plant based in Hamilton which Taylor advised is only getting better.

"Earlier this year we commissioned our Frame Washer 2.0 version of it ... it's increased the capability, that being the speed we can run frames through and get them back to beekeepers to get into the hives again."

In the last decade Taylor says that beekeepers have "absolutely voted with their feet" when it comes to the pros and cons of wooden versus plastic frames, and that has resulted in an industry now dominated by plastics.

"We were visiting sheds which were getting fuller and fuller of product which beekeepers didn't want to dispose of, but didn't have the time or inclination to process themselves. We thought there has to be a better way."

That was nearly a decade ago now, and "that's when we came up with our frame wash and wax all in one service," Taylor explained.

"It's been a great success. Well over a million frames have gone through it. I have lost count."

There has been a recent spike in demand as beekeepers eye expansion again, using recycled plastic frames in a cost effective and environmentally friendly way.

"Extending the life of those plastics is great for the environment and great for everyone's budget."

While the wash and wax plant may be in Hamilton, Taylor explained they do have South Island customers and are happy to help liaise between beekeepers to help reduce freight costs.

To hear the full conversation, search Apiarist's Advocate Pod wherever you listen, or click [here](#). ■



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BTB-03-NZ-N01-03/26



Food Labelling for Home-Based Producers – Does Privacy Matter?

BY JASON PRICE



I recently started my journey from hobby beekeeper to registering as a home producer of honey, so I can legally sell any surplus honey in the future. Compliance with the NP1 programme and Food Safety regulations will be familiar to many in the beekeeping community and it wasn't long before I came across the food labelling standards part of the exercise.

Having obtained my NP1 registration and submitting labels that publish my home address on every jar I sell, I started to share the safety and privacy misgivings of a friend who'd warned me about this requirement.

He'd told me that having his residential address in the cupboard of hundreds of random people made him a little nervous and I can see his point. He said it put him off being a registered food producer. It got me thinking about why is this requirement necessary in today's internet age?

I asked MPI, as food provider details are publicly available on the internet through a national searchable register. MPI already recognise privacy concerns here, as they allow providers operating from residential addresses to have their details redacted in the online register.

I asked why we couldn't publish another unique identifier on labels instead – for example, our unique food registration ID? In the event of a food safety concern, consumers can still find a provider through the public MPI food safety register and contact the regulators directly.

Consumers would remain protected, along with the privacy of home-based food producers' residential addresses.

MPI told me that this requirement dates from pre-1984 Food Safety Act rules (before the internet existed) that remain in current legislation. To change it, I could make a submission to amend the Food Safety Act, personally costing me anything between AUD49K and 137K to be considered. Not an option!

To my surprise, I then received a phone call from the Food Safety Minister Andrew Hoggard. My letter had crossed his desk and he wanted to know more. During our conversation, Minister Hoggard said he could see the point and it would be helpful to know if other food producers shared my privacy concerns about labelling, to make a case for change.

I said I'd find out, so through *Apriarists' Advocate*, I'm collecting your views to provide a response to the Minister. If you're a home-based food provider, you can complete this short survey about food labelling and privacy, which is open for submissions until **31 August 2026**.

<https://tally.so/r/LZgy2J>

This isn't just an issue for honey providers, but it's a good place to start. The survey is open for anyone who provides food products, so please share this link as widely as you can with anyone who produces food as a home-based business, directly or through other networks.

I'll collate all responses I receive by 31 August and send the results in my reply to Minister Hoggard, in early September.

For any questions about the survey, you can contact Jason Price via email at jpsurvey@icloud.com

Jason Price is a non-commercial beekeeper in the Hutt Valley. He has kept between three and nine hives for eight years and works in the public service. 🐝



Perrott's Honey in the Hutt Valley, just one of many home-based honey labels in New Zealand. Should they be required to include their residential address on the label?



Telling Tales from the Road



Soon the beekeeping truck will be clocking up scores of hours every week in the Bay of Plenty, in the meantime Aimz goes right back to the start, reflecting on a lifetime of adventure and misadventure of a family hitting (sometimes literally) the highways and by-ways of life and beekeeping.

Winter 2026. The bees are looking fantastic. The breath of revival is seeping through the honey shed, and we are feeling confident and positive for the incoming season.

Still, the frost settles through polar nights. Winter is for heartening fires and good company. It is also a time for telling tales, so make yourself comfortable as I rustle up a story for you.

Once there was a girl, raised in the hustle and buzz of a beekeeping family.

The day I came earthside was the most fantastic time of year, Christmas morning. My three brothers were left to babysit the presents under the tree while mum was presented with her darling angel, (me), in the hospital. Good timing Aimz. It's likely their patience has been tested ever since.

Older brothers. They were the instigators, the enablers and the insurance policy when things went sideways, and they have tested me no end. A victim of circumstance, I wound up in hospital on more than one occasion. If you're gonna be dumb, you better be tough. I learnt early in the piece there are fundamental differences that separate the boys from the girls.

The nineties was a particularly sweet era, and right from the beginning, bees brought us our daily bread. Going to school was a kind of interim between beekeeping. Mum would be feeding out sugar before, during and after school, often knocking on the

classroom window in her bee-suit to get us out early. Oh the shame of it.

But really, hats off to Mum, she pulled finger when it counted, and with little kids in tow. My early years were but a blur of bee-sites, but they were bloody good ones. (The sites as well as my memories.)

Fast forward a couple years, all my brothers were volun-told beekeeper helpers, but not yours truly. Bees weren't my thing. I had a hundred acres to explore, and I would disappear with a dog or a horse until I wanted to come home.

The autonomy I had been granted was maybe why I gained my independence at a young age. It was my Mum, who pushed me towards an automotive mechanic apprenticeship as a 15-year-old school leaver. Beekeeping was hard enough without worrying about what your teenage daughter was up to.

Having a car, and knowing a few things about them, meant that I would occasionally get midnight phone calls when one of my brothers had gone sideways themselves. If I had a bee for every vehicle they destroyed, I'd be making splits!

Between us kids we managed to make the place look like a wrecker's yard, and it drove Dad nuts. He swore never again, and the day the scrappies came was a significant event in his life.

Here my story diverges from that of home and the honey company. While I disappeared into work and creating a new



It's not supposed to go like that.



It's definitely not supposed to look like that.



family, they ticked over in the background with upheaval and expansion being common themes. The brothers stayed in and out and around sometimes, but their motor skills never got any better.

While working in Australia I would get updates from back at the bee-yard. The boys had progressed to rolling utes, trailers and a chip truck, and playing chicken with loggers and livestock.

Logging trucks don't back down in case you were wondering. His cab missed the bee truck, but the trailer cut in, grinding the bee truck into the bank and ripping the driver's door off. My brother was almost in shock as a warm, wet sensation had him thinking his leg was mangled, only it turns out to be his meat pie, fallen into his lap.

Guardian angels or just dumb luck, no-one has really hurt anything, other than pride.

What about me? Since I'm telling stories, I have a confession to make. Before I started keeping bees, I was party to an act of incompetency involving a bucket of honey in a moving vehicle. I wasn't even the driver. I kept this story under wraps for years, but since the old man celebrated his 70th, I thought I better give him a laugh as well.

One of the perks of being a beekeeper's daughter is the honey. This time I was given a tall narrow 20l bucket, full to the brim with fresh runny blackberry honey. As always, Dad asked if it was secure. Of course it was, nestled in the rear footwell of our 7-seater land rover, my oldest girl sitting in the back with it.

Halfway home up the windy ranges my child sleepily announces that her feet feel warm. Seriously, that's what she noticed. All we could do was drive, and with all the ups and downs by the time we

got home honey was running out all four doors, a visible trail up the driveway.

What would you have done? Not quite understanding the consequences for the local beekeepers, all we could do was pull the seats out and open the doors for the millions of bees, bumblebees and wasps to do the drycleaning. For days, a smoky fire burned nearby to mask the scent of honey and keep everyone docile.

They did a good job. Every last drop was sucked dry, but shame kept me silent and I told my dad it was excellent blackberry honey. (Not lying at all, of course I tried some.)

Now the years have rolled by. I am a full-time beekeeper, and I can admit my mistakes. Unlike my siblings, my driving record is almost impeccable. Years spent test driving other people's cars has made me hyper-aware of my surroundings. Here's hoping that good run lasts and I'll try to keep the sticky situations in the shed and not out on the road.

One last update on the brothers. It's possible they have grown up and repented their wicked ways with vehicles, but I'm not convinced. The pie-guy is ditching bees to drive dump trucks in Australia, so watch out world, flipping one of those babies will be child's play.

Staying warm until next time,
Aimz

Aimz is a second-generation commercial beekeeper in the Bay of Plenty who took up the hive-tool fulltime at the end of the 2024 honey season. Formerly a stay-at-home mum to four kids, she has now found her footing in the family business. 🐝



Aimz the mechanchix, a useful set of skills in my family.



Stick to your side of the road kids.



That's not how we feed out sugar these days.



Need a car wrecked? I know the crew...



Time to Talk About Super



Hanging over the head of all New Zealanders is the unavoidable fact that we have an ageing population forcing rising superannuation costs. So why are so many politicians ignoring it? Ian Fletcher sets the table for a much-needed “mature” discussion.

BY IAN FLETCHER

On 7 November we elect a Parliament, which will go on to elect a government. What we won't do is elect a different age profile for the population. We're more or less stuck with that. That fact sits beneath every promise (or hope) of lower taxes, better health care, more defence, infrastructure and public services. It also means that New Zealand Superannuation has grown from easily affordable 50 years ago to one of the the biggest items of public expenditure. We are dancing around the case for reform to limit its growth, and have more money for other things. Politicians fail us when they avoid facing up to this issue, and its happening again.

Superannuation is certainly a good social institution: simple, known in advance, individual, and protective against hardship in old age. Universality avoids stigma and complexity. We've had an old age pension in some form since 1894, and I see that commitment as a real sign of civilisation we can be proud of. But a once-good policy can become unaffordable when the population,

labour market and life expectancy change around it. Here we are. The facts are changing and we must think again.

The arithmetic is not ideology. In the 1960s there were seven New Zealanders aged 15 to 64 (paying taxes) for every person over 65. There are now four; by 2065, Treasury projects two. Most tax is paid during working life. NZ Super is paid from general taxation from age 65, and its annual rate rises with average wages. It is not a pot of money with each recipient's name on it. It is a promise that tomorrow's taxpayers must meet from current revenue.

Treasury puts NZ Super spending at 5.1 per cent of GDP now, compared with 3.9 per cent in 2006, and projects around 8 per cent by 2065 under unchanged policy. The line will not be perfectly smooth: migration, wages, employment and longevity will move it around. But its direction is plain. Raising the age helps; it does not solve the whole problem.

The Super Fund is useful. Treasury expects its withdrawals to shave only about half a percentage point of GDP from NZ Super costs after 2055. It pre-funds part of the bill; it does not cancel

It's time for politicians to realise the significance of the superannuation problem facing New Zealand says Ian Fletcher, and having a healthy, mature conversation on the matter would be "a real cultural asset".





it. Nor does immigration make the issue vanish. New arrivals grow older, while population growth adds demands for homes, transport, schools and health services.

This is about opportunity cost – the choices we give up when we choose to spend money in this way. Every permanent claim on national income leaves less room for something else: a tax cut, cancer medicine, teachers, policing, flood protection, defence, debt reduction, or the next response to an earthquake, pandemic or financial shock. These are real constraints on what future governments may do.

It's important not to catastrophise: we can afford to keep National Super as it is. But, if we do, we will need a combination of higher taxes, higher borrowing and cuts elsewhere to pay for it. Again, this is just arithmetic. If that's our choice after a proper debate, fine. My point is that we're not having the debate as we should. Having the debate now would allow for planned changes, time to adjust, and a social and personal version of the no-surprises policy politicians are so keen on. The clouds are gathering: Ministers are already anxious about our credit rating. This is an early canary-in-the-mine sign of these pressures.

Any debate should start with the proposition that NZ Super should prevent hardship. Changes should be gradual, and widely supported. I think the real debate is over need versus entitlement. Both routes are open to us as a country, but if we are to avoid the more debt/higher taxes/cuts future, we need to manage the expenditure. Otherwise we leave younger taxpayers to finance it through higher taxes, worse services or more debt. They may not welcome that.

There are several paths, but no painless options. A gradual lift in eligibility age, announced well in advance and linked to longevity, shares the adjustment across generations. Treasury says a 20-year warning materially reduces harm because people can change work and saving plans. But any age change needs strong support for people unable to work and a credible pathway for physically demanding occupations.

Changing indexation is another option: raise NZ Super with inflation rather than average wages. This manages costs but means a relative decline in the pension over time. Means testing public money more tightly, but brings complexity and can punish saving or continuing to work; even Treasury says it would have to abate surprisingly modest private incomes to make large savings.

A sensible package need not be punitive. It could grandfather people close to retirement, give long notice to everyone else, lift KiwiSaver saving over time, retain a strong poverty-prevention floor, and reform the age or indexation rule on a published timetable. The mix is political. But the key point is that refusing to decide is also a decision. It prioritises today's entitlement over tomorrow's capacity to choose. It's a tax on the future.

The wider point is that governments everywhere are under this pressure. Older populations need more support, and tax bases just don't keep up. That's why debt is rising, along with taxes, in so many countries: this debate is being repeated around the world. This is an opportunity for us to get ahead of the curve, and underpin continued stability for both our society and our economy into the future.

If we can face up to these relatively modest changes, we will keep taxes and debt lower than otherwise, and have more left over for other things. And, perhaps most importantly, we will have learned how to have a mature conversation about long term issues within our otherwise relentlessly short-term democracy. That



Pension plans and retirement savings are not just a New Zealand issue, they are forcing rising debt and higher taxes in many countries.

would be a real cultural asset, and a lesson for many others. The alternative, denial and avoidance, will foreclose the choices the next generation will need.

Ian Fletcher is a former head of New Zealand's security agency, the GCSB, chief executive of the UK Patents Office, free trade negotiator with the European Commission and biosecurity CE for the Queensland government. These days he is a commercial flower grower in the Wairarapa and consultant to the apiculture industry with NZ Beekeeping Inc. 🐝

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