

ISSUE 06, JANUARY 2020

# APIARIST'S ADVOCATE

News, Views & Promotions – for Beekeepers – by Beekeepers



# Diversifying Supply



While beekeepers feel the pinch of a troubled honey market, those whose businesses rely on their spending are also struggling. Beekeeping hardware suppliers have surveyed the scene though, and most are finding a way through.

## Diversity is the word in beekeeping supply circles.



And diversity itself comes in a range of forms, depending on the supplier and how they see their business as being able to add value to beekeepers giving added attention to their spending.

"The whole apiculture industry has had that rapid growth phase over the past five years and all boats rose on the same tide," says New Zealand Beeswax general manager Nick Taylor.

"That growth has come to a screeching halt, and no one thought that trend could continue forever, but very few, if any, saw the speed or ferocity of the turn.

"On the traditional equipment side of the business, like everyone else, we have taken a hammering."

While many suppliers cite a halving, or more, in sales revenue, not all beekeepers have been forced to rein in spending.

"A number have left the industry and there have been mergers and acquisitions, but there are customers who are spending more than they ever have," says Ecrotek Beekeeping Supplies CEO Dave Wrathall.

"I think it is a matter of the haves and the have-nots. The haves have access to good manuka therefore they know they can produce some high-value honey which is able to be sold. They are prepared to invest to do that, whereas the guys who don't necessarily have access to that manuka are a little more circumspect.

"In the past, prior to MPI's change in the manuka standard, everyone was ordering."

## READY BUYERS

As beekeepers reduce staff and delay spending, both NZ Beeswax and Ecrotek have seen an increase in demand for "hive-ready" or "ready-to-go" style hives.

"Five years ago, 80 percent of our sales were kitset and 20 percent were ready to go. That has flipped on its head, 80-20 the other way," Taylor says.

The NZ Beeswax GM believes a tightening-of-the-belt approach has seen many beekeepers crunch the numbers on the value of employing staff to assemble hives in quiet periods.

"They do the maths and come back to me and say, 'we can't beat you'. So, for us, that is going gangbusters."

Ecrotek offer a hive box assembly, dip and paint service, for which they too have seen a major increase in demand, Wrathall says.

Not all suppliers have the ability to assemble large orders of equipment as well-resourced NZ Beeswax and Ecrotek do though, and they are having to find their own form of diversity.

## A ROUGH INTRODUCTION

In Porirua, Rod Williams says he has had a "baptism of fire" to the industry, having bought beekeeping supply business Hive World in 2017, just before the tide-turned.

"I wouldn't be going now if it wasn't for hobbyists and small commercial operators," the former Condor Pumps engineer says.

"I have a good base in this part of the country, from Wellington to Kapiti and the Wairarapa. The smaller local beekeepers seem to appreciate a local guy with a shop they can come into, look around for their requirements and discuss the best ways of doing things. People still like bricks and mortar."

For Hive World, diversification means listening to beekeepers ideas and using Williams' ability to engineer innovative and bespoke products to meet their needs. It also means searching for products, often globally, that are innovative and other suppliers are not stocking, and even selling "fill your own" honey over the counter.

Despite the innovations, Williams says it is tough operating out there and that they are "just keeping our head above water".

## RIGHT-SIZING THE RIGHT SERVICE

For larger scale supplier Ecrotek, a downturn in business has meant a reduction in three staff members, one from their Christchurch branch and two in Auckland.

"The stage the industry is at, you have to be really conscious of right-sizing the business without impacting customers or the ability to do business. That is a real balance," Wrathall says.

Listening to customers closely is guiding Ecrotek's innovations and diversifications, the CEO says.



New Zealand Beeswax general manager Nick Taylor

*Ready To Go hives such as this have been popular purchases by beekeepers this season*



"We work closely with our customers and talk with them to understand their challenges. A lot of the new products and services will have come out of those discussions. For now, we know customers have issues around operational efficiencies and we are trying to help solve those problems."

A similar approach is being taken at NZ Beeswax, with Taylor saying more of their resources are being put into areas of supply and service that beekeepers are telling them they need. That means, as well as greater demand for hive-ready equipment, more beekeepers are outsourcing tasks like wax rendering and plastic frame washing and waxing.

It is not just NZ Beeswax's services where there is good demand, there is still one area of supplies that are performing well.

"Even in a tough year, beekeepers are still willing to prioritise spending on key health and nutrition products," Taylor says.

"Beekeepers have said, 'my bees are my business and I have to look after my bees or I don't have a business'. So they are still willing to spend on quality solutions that are proven, trusted and work."

### A CHANGE IN HABITS

By buying more hive-ready equipment beekeepers have been able to not only reduce staffing costs, but also delay spending to better manage cash flow.

"The buying cycle has changed. Not only is beekeeping spending down, but the way they buy has changed," Wrathall explains.

"During the high growth time of the industry, people were ordering products all year round. April and May were relatively quiet and it would really crack in in June. This last year it didn't get busy until August-September.

"People are saying, 'I'll buy it when I need it'. That has been a big change."

The change in buying habits, along with the overall reduction in sales, has seen suppliers take a more cautious approach to managing their inventory.

"Gone are the days when beekeeping suppliers will carry large buffers of millions of dollars worth of product in their warehouses, waiting for a beekeeper to turn up and order what they want," Taylor says, while offering advice to beekeepers.

"Identify your beekeeping supply partner, or combination thereof, and communicate with them about your requirements over the next six to 12 months and book in early. That will allow them to plan for it and perhaps sharpen their pencil."

### WHO WILL SURVIVE?

After five years of boom times and growth in the New Zealand honey industry, things have clearly changed for the suppliers.

"Right now that growth has come to a screeching halt and it is a maintenance only industry, but it is maintenance on a bigger base," Taylor suggests.

That means there is still some business to be had and over in the Ecrotek office their CEO is confident in the long-standing company's ability to ride it out, but unsure if it can last for all suppliers.

"At the moment there is enough to go around, but whether we can say the same thing at this time next year will depend on a lot of things — what the season looks like, how much honey is sold, whether the beekeepers can move that large amount of non-manuka multifloral honey," Wrathall says.

At NZ Beeswax, Taylor is optimistic.

"We are as excited about the five to 10 year story as we were five years ago. The next one or two years could be tough to get through though.

"Together we are on a journey. We need the whole industry to lift and we want to be there ready with beekeepers. Right there to support. If beekeepers are not making money this industry does not exist," Taylor says.

It is bottom lines that will determine the survival of beekeeping business and those that supply them, along with a willingness to stick it out, and, just as with beekeeping, there is a passion from within the supply industry to ride out the tough times. That passion is well exemplified by Rod Williams at Hive World.

"We are not going to give up," he says, "I will keep going because I love the whole industry". 🐝

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# Co-op Funding Declined



Over 170 beekeepers from around New Zealand have seen their bid to establish a non-manuka honey producers' cooperative severely setback, with the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) denying their request for funding.

The decision by MPI, made in December through their Sustainable Food and Fibres Future (SFFF) grant programme, leaves the co-op movement fighting for life. The Honey Producers' Trust, made up of beekeepers from all over New Zealand, was seeking a grant of \$2 million. The majority of that money would have been used to undertake a detailed investigation into the viability of a co-op to market and sell honey.

Trust spokesman Bruce Clow broke the news via email prior to Christmas to the more than 170 beekeepers who backed the movement. Clow advised they should now look to "start small and grow as we can".

Trust members had raised \$83,000 earlier in the year to get the project to the point of application to the SFFF grant.

However, it was considered by MPI that the problem of the "imminent collapse of the non-manuka honey industry in New Zealand", as outlined in the Trust's application, was not in line with an Apiculture New Zealand report that suggested the industry was going through a "major reset" with "supply and demand adjusting to new market conditions".

Four other areas were listed where the Trust's application was lacking. They were economic benefits, ability to deliver a co-op, a lack of co-funding, as well as limitations in capacity, planning and delivery.

Economic benefits of any potential funding were not seen as convincing because there would be no direct gain from carrying out a feasibility study alone, as it would not solve the problem of marketing non-manuka honey.

The need for "regulation or significant price incentives to function effectively at scale" was also noted as a weakness of the application, as was an application team weighted towards legal and financial aspects as opposed to marketing or scientific expertise.

The Trust has had dialogue with MPI following the release of the SFFF decision in early December, but they were advised the beekeeping collective would need to raise another \$500,000 before MPI would reconsider the application, Clow says. He advised the SFFF that figure would not be achievable. 🐝

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# Planting the Good Stuff and Spreading the Word



What started as a manuka plantation research project soon became a journey of discovery, says Manuka Farming New Zealand CEO Stephen Lee. Now, with the initial research completed and final report filed, he heads a company committed to continuing their journey by sharing their findings, while still seeking to learn more about planting high-grade manuka for honey production.

**An elite manuka variety, planted in a new location, will produce nectar as rich in dihydroxyacetone (DHA) as in its home location.**

That essential finding is the first of eight conclusions reached by the High Performance Manuka Plantation Primary Growth Partnership Programme (dubbed "The Programme") and detailed in their final report.

Without that proof, a viable industry for plantation manuka would not be economical.

With it, the door is opened on investment where landowners, beekeepers and honey companies can benefit, says Stephen Lee.

Lee heads Manuka Farming New Zealand (MFNZ), a company which was formed in 2016 as the commercial arm for The Programme, which ran between 2011 and 2018. The research project was funded by the Ministry for Primary Industries and a range of industry co-investors, including Comvita New Zealand, DR and CY Tweeddale Partnership and Landcorp Farming.

While The Programme fell short of conclusively proving that some lofty production goals for manuka plantations could be met,

it has set up MFNZ, and whoever they might collaborate with in the future, to continue a journey which began eight years ago.

"Plantation manuka provides the means for ensuring the sustainability of manuka stock for the rest of the supply chain," Lee says.

"However, the economics and risk variability in today's environment lie in the production of high-grade monofloral manuka. Learnings from The Programme and associated subsequent knowledge gained by those involved, such as myself and our team, can and should be used by the industry to achieve this end."

The report into The Programme's findings compares manuka plantations to more traditional land uses such as dairy farming and sheep and beef farming. Unsurprisingly, manuka could not compete with dairy farming's returns, but could outperform sheep and beef - given favourable conditions.

On hill country where a landowner receives a 50 percent share of the honey crop and there are no establishment costs — most likely because they are covered by funding through the One Billion Trees Programme — then a manuka plantation will likely be more profitable than running sheep or cattle on that same land, according to the report. However, Maggie Olsen, chief research officer for The Programme and now MFNZ plantation and apiary performance manager, says the economics are very much a case-by-case proposition.

"The issues with modelling a manuka plantation nationwide are that sites are very individual and the relationships and negotiations at sites are usually quite specialised to the goals of the landowner and beekeeper, the budgets involved and the issues surrounding contracting and sales," she says.

"All of that is site and plantation specific. The report has had to simplify how things are modelled."

To be of value to any of the stakeholders in the manuka honey production line, The Programme had to prove the DHA levels at plantations could match a high-grade manuka plant's production in its home environment. Olsen says thousands of nectar tests were taken across their four central and lower North Island sites to test DHA.

"Nobody had really tested that previously, but The Programme and the nectar results showed that, in comparisons to the wild manuka at the sites, introduced plants chosen for higher DHA levels in the nectar regularly outperformed the wild populations."



*A successfully established  
Manuka Farming  
New Zealand plantation.*

However, to achieve the DHA component a planting had to survive and thrive, and The Programme provided some key understandings on what is required to get good establishment of a manuka honey plantation.

"Certain varieties didn't do well, especially moving from warmer areas to those that would experience more frost events. Varieties from Northland, if in the wrong place, can have lower survival rates," Olsen says.

Once a plant gets through its initial establishment period survival rate is high, but getting beyond grazing pests and brush weeds can be a major challenge.

So, like any form of forestry or farming, there is a level of management required and just because manuka can flourish in the wild, it doesn't mean that management isn't highly important. In fact, The Programme report states "the most important conclusion reached

is that the best way to ensure a good return from planting manuka for honey is to first seek and obtain very good and detailed advice, both on manuka establishment and apiary management".

Lee says MFNZ can act as the vehicle to transfer that advice, because success relies on much more than simply "putting sticks in the ground".

Design is a key component. Lee and Olsen listed selecting the correct cultivars to match site and growing conditions, matching complementary plantings and placing apiaries to give the best chance of attaining monofloral honey as key components to success.


The report states plantations of 100ha or more offer better opportunity to produce monofloral, medical grade manuka honey, but smaller blocks can be used to stabilise existing native sites.

For Lee and his team at MFNZ, 2020 will see them focus on larger sites, looking to partner with industry to further the foundation set by The Programme, while also sharing their discoveries with the wider honey production industry.

"We undoubtedly feel we have established a basis for making a significant impact on the honey industry moving forward and it really is reliant on the level of investment shareholders or any other party are prepared to put forward," he says.

Their journey also means taking their discoveries to a wider audience.

"We see our role as to focus on making available the findings to the industry, but in particular those who will most benefit from it," Lee says, before adding a further message for beekeepers and landowners alike.

"See us as allies, contact us no matter what, and if we think we can help you we will, because we want to foster greater collaboration and share information". 



*The Manuka Farming New Zealand team, back from left Bronwyn Douglas, Rob Tiopira and Maggie Olsen. Front Stephen Lee*

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# Flood Avoidance



When flood waters from the Rangitata river spilled out across farmland in South Canterbury in early December it meant closure of numerous roads and concern for residents and farmers — beekeepers among them. While there was some damage to hives, Timaru-based Huttons Honey come off unscathed thanks to luck, good planning and in-the-moment decision making.

**Brothers Shane and Steve Hutton have owned and run their business of about 2000 hives for 34 years and have yet to lose any hives to flood waters, but last month they came close.**

"I'm not saying that we won't in the future. It has been sheer luck to this point, because the river will go where it wants," Shane Hutton says, having inspected all their hive sites following the recession of flood waters.

Not all beekeepers were so lucky though, with anecdotal evidence of small amounts of damage to hives following the December floods.

Shane says he and his brother were concerned for one of their hive sites in particular and were keen to get to them at the time of the flooding. However, both bridges across the Rangitata river were closed, due to safety concerns, and they were given only a brief window of opportunity.

"They gave us an hour to get in and then you have to be out of the area.

They were worried about some ponds

*Flood waters from the Rangitata river occupy South Canterbury farmland, putting beehives in jeopardy.*

bursting. Then, about a third of the way down, there was water coming across the road and it was getting deep and swift, really swift. My brother said, 'you want to go through that?' I said, 'is it worth it?'"

Together they decided the risk was not worth it, and that is a message Hutton wants to get across to other beekeepers.

"Is it worth losing your life over something like that? going to try get hives out when a river is in full flood and roaring past. You can always replace them."


Hutton says researching sites before placing hives has been key to their business avoiding damage over the years.

"If you speak to the farmers who have been there a long time, they know where it floods and where it doesn't.

"It is common sense really — putting them on the high spots, not in the hollows or river beds."

Although Huttons Honey has flood and fire insurance for their most at-risk sites, they have never had to implement it Hutton says.

Knowing insurance is there to replace hives if needed could lead to beekeepers taking less personal risks to save them though.

Now busy in the midst of pollination and honey production season, Hutton is happy in their decision to avoid undue personal risks during flooding, saying, "at the end of the day, they are only beehives". 

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# ApiWeb Set for an Upgrade



Beekeepers can expect to see a new and improved system for registering hives and apiaries with the Management Agency for the American Foulbrood National Pest Management Plan by next spring.

In mid-December the Agency released a Registration of Interest (ROI) document, seeking tenders to provide a customer management system and/or a financial management information system to replace ApiWeb, which is currently run by AssureQuality.

"ApiWeb has been around a long time and is due an overhaul," says Clifton King, National Compliance Manager for the Agency.

The front end of ApiWeb, which beekeepers see when entering apiary data, was built about five years ago, but the actual database dates back to the 1990s King believes.

The Agency is tasked with eliminating AFB from New Zealand, but the current state of their databases is limiting their effectiveness and needlessly tying up staff.

"Currently there is a lot of manual effort, which really should be automated," King says.

A lot of that effort comes when staff have to manually match a beekeeper's information from the apiary database with the financial system. So, as well as submitting a plan for establishing and managing a new and improved version of ApiWeb, the Agency is asking prospective developers to outline a system which will allow both apiary and finance databases to "talk" to one another.

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"From a beekeeper perspective, they would reasonably assume that when they update their details in one system it would update our other system as well, but that is not how it currently works and that needs to be solved," King says.

Not only will that functionality save staff time, but it will allow more accurate invoicing. The current lag between databases has been an area of concern for beekeepers and agency when determining correct annual levies.

Registering of apiary locations easily and accurately has also been a concern with ApiWeb and any new system would need to have improved functionality in that area, the National Compliance Manager says.

"The current manual process where beekeepers have to type in a six or eight digit easting and northing to tell us the location of apiaries is very difficult for beekeepers and error prone. They should be able to register using a smart phone out in the apiary or pull up a map with Google Earth or equivalent and click on the map."

The release of the ROI document started an open tender process which King hopes will result in a large pool of vendors showing interest by the January 31 deadline. From that pool they will narrow the search to a smaller group and ultimately decide who wins the tender by June 2020. Following that decision,


development work is hoped to begin almost immediately and be completed later that spring.

King says they have elected an open tender process, rather than shoulder tapping known providers, because they believe investment in a thorough search for the best provider will pay off in the long run.

"There are a lot of different tool sets out there which could meet the requirements, but some will meet those requirements better than others. So it is actually worth the upfront investment. Similarly, with the development, it is also about providing the solution long term. This is a long term investment and it is really important to get the right company there.

"In previous jobs I have managed a number of IT projects and it has always proved worthwhile to invest in analysis and planning of the project. When you kick-off too quickly, or without doing your due diligence, you find your project will not go so well."

The Agency has provided an indicative costing for implementation and on-going management of their systems over a five year period of \$975,000 to help guide interested parties. The figure fits inside the beekeeper-funded Agency's budget, King says, adding that it is much-needed work.

"At the end of the day we are all here to eliminate AFB, not spend a lot of time struggling with paper." 



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# Beaut-Utes and Bee Suits: An Irishman's Venture into Kiwi Beekeeping



Anthony Morgan travelled from county Wexford, Ireland, to New Zealand in November, never having opened a beehive but keen to learn a potential new past-time. Here he details his dive into the deep-end of beekeeping, where the hives have provided an escape and stirred a range of emotions.

**I think the seed was planted by my sister one day, maybe three years ago. She asked me, half-jokingly, 'would you keep the bee?' At the time I had a home worm farm, which I delighted in using to compost my vegetable waste, which really was my pride and joy. So her suggestion came, I suppose, with regard to keeping small and numerous creatures!**

Work commitments in Europe kept me away from Ireland for many years. So, when I decided that I had had enough of overseas soul-selling, I determined that the time was now to pursue my interest and live my dreams, not when I was old and grey.

My plan, as an absolute bee-ginner, is to start my new hobby with two or three hives next spring in Ireland. By taking advantage of some summer-time beekeeping in New Zealand, hopefully I will be equipped with the confidence and hands-on skills needed back home in county Wexford.

Having written to quite a few beekeepers last October, I was disappointed that none replied to me. Basically I was writing to ask if they could use an extra pair of willing hands for a few weeks, which would be of benefit to both parties. I would be travelling to New Zealand in November, regardless of courteous replies or none at all.

Thankfully, none-at-all finally turned into one very positive response from Pyramid Apiaries, based in Marlborough, and Apiarist's Advocate, with Paddy also kindly offering to print my letter in his eMagazine. Several emails later and I was arranging my travel to visit Paddy and Laura, lend a hand with their hives, and, at the same time, learn at least the very basics of my new hobby.

Thankfully, beekeeping to me is just a hobby. I say this because I know I will not have to get up at 4am to move hives to manuka sites. My native Irish bees will be happy to stay at home and forage on nearby clover, gorse, willow and apple blossom.

The only manuka we know in Ireland is the madly expensive stuff on the supermarket shelves!

But it has been a pleasure, 4am starts or not, to see the world from Paddy and Laura's point of view. I playfully call their utes 'beaut-utes' in novel admiration of their on and off-road capabilities.

It is these beaut-utes which find themselves strapped up very tightly with a heavy cargo of boxes, bees and brood. Once loaded up for the early moves we carefully drive down the main road, onto a farm track and then through very rough farmland. The terrain is a challenging mix of sharp stony track occasioned by small rockslides blocking our path temporarily, rising thick dust clouds,



*Irish trainee beekeeper Anthony Morgan with one of Pyramid Apiaries' "beaut-utes" in Marlborough.*

muddy, deep troughs and quick-flowing creeks with near-vertical climbs on the other side. Oftentimes we use first gear and shift the 4WD box to low.

But, to me at least, the view from the beaut-utes and the bone-rattling journey to his beautiful office of manuka hives in remote countryside hands-down beats commuting to work in bumper-to-bumper traffic, further fouled by honking horns and infectious anxiety.

Working with bees is naturally distressing. I find it far easier to 'live in the moment' while working with nature than I do as an electrician on a dusty, noise-filled building site. While beekeeping will most likely be a hobby for me and not an enterprise, I know already that I can escape into my after-work world of beekeeping when I lay down my tools for the day.

In the few weeks I have known Paddy and Laura, I have indeed managed to grasp at least a little of what they patiently teach me. I can identify eggs, worker and drone brood, queen cells, play cups, pollen, nectar and capped honey, the queen bee, workers, drones and even wax moth. I understand the basics of queen-rearing and how to introduce a mated queen into a queenless hive. Occasionally I can even spot an unmarked virgin queen.

Oftentimes in life I have consciously avoided jumping into the deep end when it comes to learning something new. This time, I just knew jumping deep into beekeeping would not be scary, but pleasantly exciting. I was not wrong.

There is so much to learn about these fascinating, hard-working creatures, working together in fantastic cooperation, 50,000 strong in the dark of the same hive.

Coming to New Zealand to learn about beekeeping is the very tip of my iceberg. Under the water is the admiration, fascination, awe, inspiration — and of course enjoyment — of keeping bees. It is about learning for the rest of my life.

It is also about envy and sadness, that we mere human beings cannot begin to compare to bees when it comes to order, discipline, cooperation, instinct, mutual respect and utter determination to survive as a species.

I encourage anybody even remotely interested to start your journey into beekeeping and to support one another along the way. The bees work so hard and have such a short life. They are an immense joy to observe and a privilege to work with, never to be taken for granted.

Anybody reading this who keeps bees or who wants to keep bees, if Ireland is on your bucket list please feel free to contact me so you may come and visit 'me and me bees'. The only conditions? Apart from loving bees, you must also love beaut-utes and at least try the Guinness!

**Anthony Morgan, Co. Wexford, Ireland.**

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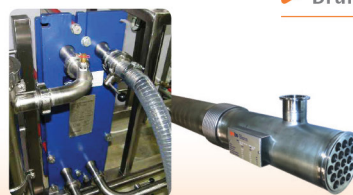


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# Making the Correct Correction



Long-time Mid Canterbury beekeeper Roger Bray responds to *Apiarist's Advocate's* story, *Out of Our Control*, on Airborne Honey and the state of the New Zealand honey market, published last month.



**It is surprising a company involved in beekeeping and honey marketing for 109 years claim they do not control their affairs. Surely the management of Airborne Honey, establishes the price they pay their suppliers, the price they charge for their products and ultimately how they use the margin to maintain their position in the market.**

I agree with many of Peter Bray's (editor's note: Roger and Peter are not related) sentiments expressed in the *Apiarist's Advocate*, December 2019. However, perhaps it should be more clearly stated the current situation is as a result of industry promotions that have contributed to growth of the production base that continually oversupplies honey that can be accommodated at reasonable returns to beekeepers.

The figures that are available indicate the industry has had stable volumes of honey exports of 8-9,000 tonnes annually for the years since 2013. The domestic market during that time has been stable, or rather flat, as prices for honey increased.

It appears in 2013 the "industry" supported a production base of 450,000 beehives. The figures for 2018 show volume of honey exported at the upper end of 8,000 tonnes while the number of beehives has doubled from the 2013 stats quoted. Whilst there are a number of anomalies with the figures collected and quoted in the 2018 Apicultural Monitoring Report compiled by MPI, it is not

difficult to work out the stability of the honey industry has been disrupted by the increase in numbers of beehives, and the increase in value of honey exported.

If we could assume the industry was stable in 2013 then, as Peter suggests, the industry could accommodate 12,000 tonnes of honey from 300-450,000 hives, and return to the producer prices in the \$5-7.30/kg range for bulk honey. The extra 450- 600,000 beehives coming into production effectively produced honey that was surplus to requirements and did not have a destination. It was actually worth nothing if the status quo was to remain. The aspect



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the Kiwi beekeepers face is the honey being stockpiled had a considerable capital and production cost to establish, and maintain.

The surplus of honey produced and held by beekeepers has influenced the buying patterns of those that trade in honey. It has allowed them to pick the field and leverage the price of all honey downward. This is often referred to as a "correction in the market", but we must be careful what needs to be corrected.

Where correction is well overdue is the manner in which people operate their businesses.

Some are in control of their affairs and for other businesses, control is forced on them. The world is divided between the price setters and the price takers. Those at the beginning and end of the process (producers and consumers respectively) are subject to accepting whatever the "market" (i.e. marketing people) decide.

How can a beekeeper factor in to his costings all the appropriate costs, then operate his business on a cost-plus basis similar to other businesses, when there are so many factors beyond the control of the producer? The purchaser of the honey crop indicates he will only pay \$X for the honey, despite how the producer (beekeeper) may justify his selling price. If beekeepers have a 'poor season' is there an ability for them to increase the price of honey that is produced to cover the beekeeper's overheads and maintain margin (profit) when the buyer remains firm on the price he is prepared to pay?

Peter commented that there needs to be a clearing of the decks so that production and demand are better aligned. One way to clear the decks is by cutting the price to increase consumption. This is what is happening at present with the producer now sustaining prices that are being cut on the supermarket shelves.

However, if there is an annual production of honey in excess of requirements then the decks will need to be cleared on an annual basis. An easier way to address the oversupply problem is to reduce the production base.

Maybe there are now 500,000 more beehives in New Zealand than the industry can sustain. Perhaps those industry commentators that promoted beekeeping as a gold rush that anybody could join, can come up with some practical suggestions how the number of beehives can be cut by at least 50 percent. Maybe there are alternatives we should consider. Could they inform those that were enticed into beekeeping how they will have sufficient gold available for them to pay the bills, feed their families and halve their hive holding?

Despite the promotions around honey selling for extraordinary prices per jar in Harrods, there are some genuine beekeepers and their families suffering tough times because the "industry" was sucked into the hype promoted by some industry commentators that had little experience in beekeeping or the beekeeping industry.

Now is the time for their comments on practical solutions to come forward with the same frequency as they initially promoted the beekeeping gold rush. 🐝



# Practical Beekeeping in New Zealand (5th Ed.)



The Definitive Guide  
ANDREW MATHESON & MURRAY REID

For more than 25 years *Practical Beekeeping in New Zealand* has been the bible for New Zealand beekeepers. The only comprehensive guide to keeping bees in New Zealand, it provides both amateur and professional beekeepers with details on honey bee management throughout the year, advice on handling hive products and information about many other beekeeping subjects. Each month *Apiarist's Advocate* will run a small extract, such as this one on sugar shake testing.

## SAMPLING HIVES FOR VARROA


One of the easiest sampling methods is the sugar shake method. It is bee-friendly, and can be done on one visit to the apiary.

Fit a 550ml jar with a plastic or wire mesh lid and fill it one third full with about 300 bees. Push a desert spoon of dry icing sugar through the mesh onto the bees, and roll the jar for a few seconds to coat the bees in the sugar. Vigorously shake the jar over a light-coloured tray or hive lid.

Keep shaking until no more varroa appear. Most mites will fall through the mesh with the sugar and be easily seen.

The sensitivity can be increased by repeating the test. Apply a second spoonful of sugar and roll and shake as above. The bees can be returned to the colony when you have finished with them. Do not reuse the icing sugar as it will not work well a second time. It will also not work well in the rain, and sometimes if there is a very heavy honey flow, since the icing sugar gets sticky.

If you see 40 or more mites then you need to treat the hive as soon as possible. You may also need to treat if you cannot get back to your hives for another month or so, as mite numbers can explode from natural development and invasions, particularly in autumn.

For plenty more on varroa and treating your hives, refer to the full version of *Practical Beekeeping in New Zealand*, available from Exisle Publishing. 



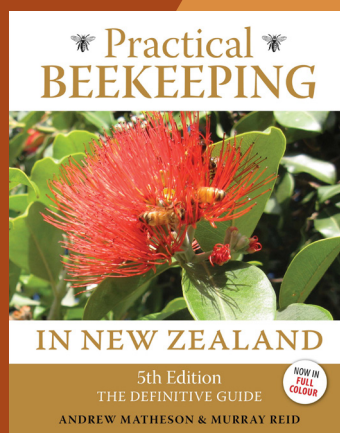
Using the sugar-shake method.



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