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News, Views & Promotions - for Beekeepers - by Beekeepers



Kiwi Can-Do?

With kiwifruit and honey industries
trending in opposing directions, will
pollination needs be met?

Filling the Orchards



Kiwifruit orchards are on the increase while beehive totals are on a steep decline, and with the former relying heavily on the latter to produce a crop, Bay of Plenty orchardists are having to go further and further afield to find hives. There's concern the quality of the beehives placed is not what it should be, and that more orchards run the risk of missing out on their most important pollinators altogether this spring.

Hive shortages, weak or even dead hives placed in orchards, and severely reduced crops, the disparity between growth and recession in kiwifruit and beekeeping industries respectively is putting growers at risk, those in both industries say.

"You wouldn't believe what I saw," says Neale Cameron a former beekeeper who makes the effort to audit the beehives placed in orchards of the three Bay of Plenty kiwifruit entities he is general manager of.



Beehives usually get placed in flowering kiwifruit orchards at 10-12 hives per hectare, but at that rate they need to hold strong and healthy colonies to optimise pollination.

"You couldn't get any worse. There were hives which I opened up which didn't look like they had been opened for a year. Nothing in it and they were charging \$200-odd. Some beekeepers didn't even show up with hives. They just said, 'oh well I haven't got them'. It was really bad."

New Zealand Beekeeping Inc president Jane Lorimer, who owns and manages Waikato business Hillcrest Apiaries, says she is fairly certain there were shortages in the Gold variety of kiwifruit orchards at pollination time last spring.

"I was rung by a beekeeper being asked to 'please supply some hives', so I think there was some orchardists who missed out because they had left it to the nth hour to organise a beekeeper," Lorimer says.

Looking to the coming spring, the same problems may manifest she worries, despite beekeepers being keen for the work for their hives.

"There will definitely be growers scrambling for hives. Ourselves, we are going to have a lot more hives going into Waikato orchards because they have increased their Gold variety. I can see there will be a point, if communication isn't improved, that there will be shortages. The beekeepers who are wanting to do it, may not even get to the guys who want hives," Lorimer says.

The figures bear that out too, with registered hive numbers in New Zealand having fallen from a high of 918,000 in 2019 to 601,000 at last report. The North Island numbers have gone from 694,000 to 418,000 in that time. Compare that to the growth of kiwifruit plantations, up 12.5% from 12,905 producing hectares in 2019/20 to 14,512ha in 2022/23. That's 1607ha of new orchards that require beehives, at an average of 10-12 hives per ha. Bay of Plenty is home to by far the largest area of kiwifruit orchards, with 11,429ha.

A DESIRABLE UNDERTAKING

Kiwifruit pollination contracts have become more appealing to beekeepers in recent seasons as they grapple to keep their businesses afloat as honey prices reduce. That's in stark contrast to the mānuka boom years of the 2010s Lorimer says.

"Most Bay of Plenty beekeepers got their businesses going by pollinating a whole lot of kiwifruit, then mānuka came along and they realised they could make more money there so they chased it. Doing one pollination job, at most, then heading off down the line."

Now pollination contracts are sought-after again and some hives are even destined for two or three different stints in orchards each spring. Those multi-placements are getting more and more difficult due to the prevalence of the Gold variety Cameron explains.

"We used to get two or three pollinations a season out of a hive. The Gold early then the Haywood (Green) after. Some people would even try to get three pollinations out of a hive. Now because of the variety we have it is not that early, it is pretty difficult to get two placements. You can get one, but that doesn't cover a huge amount of costs. It is not the earner it used to be. A beekeeper's costs for the year used to be covered by pollination work. So, when they headed out of the orchards, anything else was cream. Now, it is not working out that way with only getting one pollination placement out of a hive," Cameron says.

Typical per-hive payments pay between \$200 and \$300 Cameron says.

Katikati beekeeper Mark Silson, owner of KiwiCoast Apiaries, undertakes kiwifruit pollination, but is amazed when he sees hives being trucked in from far-away areas, such as Northland, and wonders if they will be back the following season when the owners crunch the numbers.

"There is a cash flow, but there are significant costs associated with keeping and maintaining beehives to ensure they are at a good pollination standard. With the Gold crop now, these have

New Zealand has seen an increase of 1607ha of licenced kiwifruit orchard area since 2019, all the while beehive numbers have fallen.

to be ready earlier. Diesel, RUCs, wages and sugar syrup are all substantial costs and they don't go down," Silson says.

DELIVERING THE GOODS

As Cameron reports, some beekeepers appear happy to cash in on hive placements while not ensuring the suitability of those hives. Having worked as a beekeeper, then for Zespri educating growers and beekeepers on the importance of pollination, and now as GM

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of kiwifruit businesses which rely on the bees doing their thing every spring, he well knows the industry standard for hive strength.

"Twelve full depth frames of bees when viewed from the top, covering top to bottom of frame. Seven frames of 60% brood on both sides, and that is brood of all stages of development, eggs, larvae, pupae. It needs a laying queen, some food supply and to be free of disease," Cameron lists.

As it stands there is very little auditing of hives in orchards which takes place though Cameron believes, with his inspections the exception to the norm. As far as he knows, there is very sporadic checks organised by individual orchardists, andASUREQuality offering a service through just one inspector for the whole Bay of Plenty.

"Growers are incredibly trusting and if they have a long-term relationship with a beekeeper they may never look at the hives. The auditing is just not enough," Cameron says.

"The cost of not getting quality of hives right is huge. By getting pollination wrong, the impact to kiwifruit is absolutely ginormous."

For this reason there has been legal action taken against beekeepers who failed to supply the goods in the past. One of the driving factors behind the Kiwifruit Pollination Association, which operated through the 1990s and early 2000s and routinely audited beekeeping member's hives, was to assure quality and provide a paper trail proving as much.

Ensuring hive strength is getting harder Lorimer believes.

"The hive strengths in the last couple of years have been variable, more variable than in the past. It stems from having high

Success! But will there be enough quality beehives to ensure kiwifruit growers can set a heavy crop in the coming years?

hive losses in the area and beekeepers struggling to get hives up to strength.

"At times you think you have hives ready to go for kiwifruit and then you go to check them before putting them in and you go 'argh they haven't come up to strength'. What are you going to do?" Lorimer says.

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It seems some beekeepers are placing them in orchards anyway, a suspicion which Lorimer holds as she has witnessed neighbouring orchard's hives with little bee activity as she does her rounds.

GETTING ON THE SAME PAGE

For those doing it right though, kiwifruit pollination is once again proving the foundation of beekeeping businesses. New Zealand Beeswax general manager Nick Taylor is seeing the results of that.

"The green shoots that are out there are very modest and almost exclusively pollination focused," he says, also pointing out that is not limited to kiwifruit.

"It's where beekeepers can get short travel distances, multi-cropping arrangements, where honey becomes almost a by-product and bonus at the end of the season, not the money driver. That gives business models that can just tick along and we are seeing modest growth from some small operators."

While that may be the case, it's a buck to the overall trend and so Lorimer believes, with the Kiwifruit Pollination Association and the link it offered between growers and beekeepers now well in the past, its high time that the two groups improved communications.

"We want to get kiwifruit growers on side with us so we can talk about their hive needs, as well as some issues around hive losses, to determine whether we are going to be able to meet this coming season's requirements. There hasn't been much information sharing and so we are trying to establish regular communications," the NZBI president says.



Silson is another person who sits on both sides of the fence, owning not only his KiwiCoast Apiaries hives but also a kiwifruit orchard. He believes both parties need to start thinking about the looming spring season now, but he fears many may not be.

"Orchardists will be busy thinking about their crop and harvest and possibly not thinking about bees yet," Silson says, adding that the proactive beekeepers will be setting their hives up for spring now.

"Everything starts from now, getting them going into winter well, over-wintering well and coming out strong. We are getting varroa reinvasion now, in autumn, so it is not only a challenge, but a huge cost."

A huge cost for beekeepers perhaps, but still not as high of a cost as which growers are at risk of copping should they not find beehives and beekeepers who are up to the job. 🐝

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Conference Calendar



While the major social event of the New Zealand beekeeping calendar of recent years, Apiculture New Zealand's (ApiNZ) multi-day national conference, is being wound back to a singular "Summit Day" in 2024, beekeepers will not be without a calendar of get-togethers and educational experiences this winter. Various industry groups and businesses having set dates for events in North and South islands, from centres as diverse as Hamilton, Whanganui, Paengaroa and Ashburton.

Since its formation in 2016 ApiNZ has hosted large conferences each winter, held in the likes of Rotorua, Taupo, Christchurch and Blenheim, which at their height attracted well over 1000 delegates. With attendance numbers back into the hundreds in recent years as the beekeeping industry contracts amidst falling honey prices, the decision to move to a "Summit Day" in Hamilton, Tuesday June 18, has been made.

The focus of the summit will be the Honey Industry Strategy released by ApiNZ this year. The AGM will also take place and, while the programme has yet to be confirmed, they plan to include more to entice beekeepers to attend, chief executive Karin Kos has said.

What can be confirmed is, unlike the multi-day events of the past, there will not be a trade-display, and the event will be held at Waikato University. The university is an institution which the New Zealand honey industry owes decades of prosperity too, following Peter Molan's groundbreaking research into the bioactivity of mānuka honey there in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s.

Outside of the Summit Day, ApiNZ is also working through plans for a "roadshow" of meetings with one topic to the fore.

"Progressing the Honey Industry Strategy is a major focus for us this year and so it will be discussed at our Summit Day, and we hope to have various other smaller get-togethers with beekeepers in different parts of the country where we can discuss and improve it too. Dates for these have yet to be confirmed though," Kos says.



Diminishing attendance to ApiNZ's national conferences, such as here in Rotorua 2023, has meant it will move to a one-day event this June. There looks set to be plenty of other beekeeping get-togethers on the calendar though.

BOOKENDING EVENTS

While the ApiNZ Summit Day will be a stand-alone, single-day event on June 18, either side of it will be other beekeeping get-togethers in the region.

Monday June 17 will see the 5th iteration of The New Zealand Honey Bee Research Symposium take place at Plant and Food Research's Ruakura site, the home of apiculture research for the company, and about 4km from the university. Last year the Research Symposium was held a day ahead of ApiNZ's conference in Rotorua and drew around 120 people to learn of the latest findings from academia, scientists and research beekeepers. Organiser Prof. Phil Lester says they are hoping to continue that interest level.



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"It has been a reasonably successful model and beekeepers have been happy with it, so we will keep it in a similar vein and we will be keeping registration costs as cheap as possible, especially with Plant and Food Research kindly donating their venue," Lester says.

Beekeepers making their way to Hamilton will be able to fill their Monday at the Symposium, Tuesday at the ApiNZ Summit Day and Wednesday, June 19, supply company New Zealand Beeswax are planning an open day and science workshop.

"When the conference was pushed back to a summit day, we rang around beekeepers to see what they would be missing," NZ Beeswax general manager Nick Taylor says.

"Unanimous feedback supported the ability to socialise and network with other beekeepers, and also an interest in real-world, practical science, that can be applied in beekeeping businesses today."

Therefore, that will be the focus of the NZ Beeswax workshop, with various experts from around New Zealand and potentially the world expected to speak to beekeeping science. The event will be open to all beekeepers and held at the Distinction Hotel.

SNIBG GO BIG

The Southern North Island Beekeeping Group (SNIBG) say they are wanting to fill the void left by the slimming-down of ApiNZ's conference and are in the early stages of putting together a three or four day conference, to be held in Whanganui, August 10-13.

SNIBG is well-worn at hosting such events, having put on three over a 20-year period when they operated as a branch of ApiNZ's

predecessor, the National Beekeepers' Association. The most recent of those was in June 2014.

"We will be going back to the old format of Sunday as a hobby day, Monday, Tuesday and perhaps Wednesday as seminar days," a press release from SNIBG states.

The changing nature of varroa management is likely to be a focus of the event and anyone interested in presenting a paper at the conference on beekeeping topics relevant to New Zealand beekeepers is invited to contact the conference secretary Frank Lindsay via email, lindsays.apiaries@gmail.com.

NZBI GO ON THE ROAD

The Honey Industry Strategy, released by ApiNZ in February, is set to be a main topic of the talk at six different Discussion Days organised by New Zealand Beekeeping Inc (NZBI). Three in the North Island and three in the South.

NZBI was highly critical of the Strategy upon release, declaring it "dead on arrival". The six gatherings, spread across May and June, will be used to determine beekeeper sentiment on the strategy.

"These discussions will guide how we move forward," NZBI president Jane Lorimer says.

"If we find we are offside to what beekeepers are thinking then we will really need to give more thought to how we represent our members and the wider beekeeping industry too."

Venues are Whangarei, Paengaroa, Palmerston North, Nelson, Christchurch and Gore.



A number of issues of importance to beekeepers, some specific to each location, will also be discussed, with expert speakers planned.

"These meetings are open to everybody and open to all viewpoints. I would really like to know what people are thinking and why they are thinking it," Lorimer says.

A BOP REGULAR

For the past two years Bay of Plenty honey facility Mānuka Orchard have welcomed beekeepers to Paengaroa for an informative Open Day and owner Logan Bowyer says they are looking forward to doing so again, with a date in July still to be confirmed. In the past the event has drawn about 50 beekeepers and industry suppliers, with a trade display and speakers presenting to a range of practical beekeeping topics. Bowyer says that is the model they will follow this year, while also updating beekeepers on the advancements made at Mānuka Orchard.

IN THE SOUTH

While the major beekeeping events look set to be dominated by North Island locations, in the south there will be NZBI's three Discussion Days, plus the Canterbury Hub of ApiNZ have their oft-held Beekeepers' Day Out scheduled for June 26 in Ashburton. In years where the main ApiNZ conference is held in the North Island, the Canterbury Hub has taken to hosting a South Island mini-conference. Lincoln University has been the venue for a trade display and expert speakers several years previous. This winter,

that format is likely to remain, but with the event moving an hour's drive south.

AND THE REST

Then there is the smaller, and more frequent, meetings held by local beekeeping groups. So, while there won't be as large a single cluster of beekeepers anywhere this winter, there is still plenty of events on the calendar. 🐝

WINTER 2024 BEEKEEPING EVENTS, NORTH TO SOUTH

Whangarei	NZBI Discussion Day	June 11
Hamilton	Honey Bee Research Symposium	June 17
Hamilton	ApiNZ Summit Day	June 18
Hamilton	New Zealand Beeswax Workshop	June 19
Paengaroa	NZBI Discussion Day	June 8
Paengaroa	Mānuka Orchard Open Day	July, day TBC
Whanganui	SNIBG Seminar Days	August 10-13
Palmerston Nth	NZBI Discussion Day	June 15
Nelson	NZBI Discussion Day	May 30
Christchurch	NZBI Discussion Day	May 28
Ashburton	ApiNZ Canterbury Hub Beekeepers' Day Out	June 26
Gore	NZBI Discussion Day	May 25

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Time: 9am – 3.30pm

Dates: SOUTH ISLAND
Saturday 25th May 2024 – Gore
Tuesday 28th May 2024 – Christchurch
Thursday 30th May 2024 – Nelson

NORTH ISLAND
Saturday 8th June 2024 – Paengaroa, BoP
Tuesday 11th June 2024 – Whangarei
Saturday 15th June 2024 – Palmerston North

Costs: To be Advised

DISCUSSIONS

ApiNZ Honey Strategy Discussion

Future Direction – Your Views

Regional Issues

Topic of Interest – Varroa

Beekeeper Chat

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Honey Expert to Teach Sensory Analysis Skills



You would be hard pressed to find anyone more enthusiastic about the potential of New Zealand honey than Maureen Conquer. The Auckland-based honey judge has been at the forefront of honey sensory analysis in Aotearoa since she returned from training in Italy 13 years ago. Now she is offering Kiwi beekeepers, honey technicians, chefs, foodies, or anyone with a taste for honey the opportunity to expand their pallet, knowledge and skills in a three-day workshop, in Auckland, in April. It's all part of a long-held goal to advance the New Zealand honey industry, she explains.

Conquer is an unabashed 'foodie' having spent decades as a chef, beekeeper and, before that, the founder of the now well-recognised Matua wine label. So, when in the 1990s she brought the concepts of value-adding to the honey at her BeesOnline honey centre and restaurant, based in Waimauku north-west of Auckland, the focus on sustainability and individual varietals of honey were not well understood.

"Most of the beekeepers thought I was totally nuts," Conquer reflects.

"When I started in the '90s beekeepers just got all their honey, blended it together, whacked it in a cheap plastic container and sold it for pennies."

It soon became her mission to not only gain better value for the wonderful honey produced in her own apiaries, but that of the whole industry. Therefore, having spent time as a wine and food judge, she began to eye bringing a similar level of expertise to her new passion.

"The response from the beekeeping industry was 'oh yes, we had a bloke who did that once and he died, of diabetes.' That was it. No one appeared interested in marketing honey like that. It was seen as hocus-pocus stuff," Conquer recalls.

Having been bitten by the beekeeping and honey bug – "I went from one hive, to three to six, to 36 in six months. Read all the books I could, and spoke to everybody, because tasting that fresh honey was amazing" – Conquer's passion for honey took her to Bologna, Italy in 2011 to immerse herself in three-days of one-on-one workshops with renown honey sensory analysis experts Dr Maria Lucia Piana and Gian Luigi Marazzan.

Conquer has not only been lead judge at the New Zealand Honey Awards, but judged honey and mead at international competitions. Now, having seen the standard of honey exhibited in New Zealand soar, she believes the time is right to train the next generation of honey tasting experts.

"I am pleased that there is acceptance for this. When I came back home really inspired, 13 years ago now, I had the blessing of my tutor in Italy, Lucia. She was the first to start this whole journey and said, 'yes, go back and teach' and she gave me all the notes. But no one wanted to know about it here, they all thought I was a bit nuts. Now, there is enough people showing interest and it is very exciting for me."

Therefore, April 10-12 in Auckland, Conquer will be imparting some of the skills and knowledge gained in her decades of dedication to honey sensory analysis and is calling on beekeepers, honey technicians, chefs or just passionate foodies to make contact and book a space on the course. She says it will be



Maureen Conquer will impart some of her considerable knowledge of honey sensory analysis in a three-day course in Auckland, April 10-12.

Photo: Dan Childs.

the longest and most detailed honey sensory analysis training experience ever offered in New Zealand, with Conquer having presented one or two-day courses upon request in the past, but nothing to the level which the upcoming training will provide.

"I am trying to get people inspired. It is about lots of tasting and trying to memorise what you have tasted," she says.

There is a busy schedule planned for the course, including 'vertical' tastings – honey from the same apiary in different seasons – as well as horizontal; the same variety of honey from the same season, but across different regions.

"I want to keep it as a relatively small group so we can share our experiences. We will have some tasting independently, then everyone can share what they are tasting, because with one honey you can have five different experiences between people."

There will be a focus on New Zealand's main honey varieties on day one; mānuka, kānuka, honey dew, clover, kamahi, thyme, rewarewa, pohutukawa, tawari, vipers bugloss and rata; then on day two and three lesser known varieties will be added such as matagouri, black currant and orange blossom. There will also be analysis of the different forms of honey; liquid, comb, naturally crystallised, and creamed.

Conquer is a passionate believer that, if the New Zealand honey industry is to reach its potential it must present to consumers qualities in honey that are not being fully realised yet, such as full flavour profiles and regional and seasonal differences. New Zealand was once one of the largest consumers of honey, per head of population, and to get back there Conquer says we need to tell the



Participants in Maureen Conquer's honey sensory analysis workshop will have the opportunity to taste and learn about not only New Zealand's most common honey varieties, but several lesser-known honeys, all to help foster a new generation of honey experts.

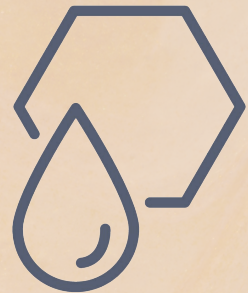
full story behind our honey to appeal to a new generation of honey buyer.

"By selling the stories and getting people emotively hooked into the product, it will help honey sell more and give the opportunity for added value," she says. That is why she is motivated to help train more people to fully appreciate honey.

"We need to get new people developing these skills right across the board in our industry, so it is not just the big guys who are exporting. It is equally important, but in a different way, for the small beekeeper or chef to be inspired and impassioned by the different ingredients available," she says adding, "Honey has to be the ultimate slow food and we need to learn to capture the terroir and natural sweetness of the regions". 🐝

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Wellington Beekeepers Pay Homage to Frank Lindsay



Stories of decades of dedication to beekeeping, wise counsel, and the odd beekeeping-quip marked an evening of much enjoyment for the Wellington Beekeepers Association (WBA) recently when they recognised life member Frank Lindsay's far-reaching contributions.

The Wellington beekeeper's 50-plus years of constant dedication to beekeeping were recognised in the 2024 New Year Honours List with a New Zealand Order of Merit, and the WBA thought it only fitting to hold a club get-together where stories of Lindsay's exploits could be shared.

"It's been fun, and beekeeping is fun," the man of the hour surmised as he acknowledged those honouring him at the Johnsonville Community Centre.

Around 60 people from the WBA, as well as the Southern North Island Beekeeping Group (SNIBG), both of which Lindsay is a life member of, were in attendance. Also there to recognise Lindsay's efforts was Karin Kos, chief executive of Apiculture New Zealand (ApiNZ), another organisation to which Lindsay holds a life membership through his work with its predecessor, the National Beekeepers' Association.

"You just keep learning," the Wellington apiarist said of the craft which he first practiced with a small number of hives 57 years ago, before going commercial at age 48. Now in his 70s, Lindsay is back to a more manageable holding of hives, but continues to be heavily involved in WBA and SNIBG activities.

He and wife Mary-Ann Lindsay were welcomed to the event with a hearty round of applause as they entered the building through a guard of honour of hive-tools, held aloft by fellow club members.

Mary-Ann's support of her husband and the beekeeping groups was also acknowledged with the WBA presenting her a bouquet

of flowers which was met with the most fitting of responses for a beekeeper when she declared "they probably should have stayed in the garden".

That presentation, and cutting of beehive-themed cake, was preceded by a range of speakers, attesting to how the New Year's Honour was fitting. WBA president Tricia Laing praised Lindsay for being "the embodiment of a beekeeper who thinks global, but who acts local".

Despite being aware of Lindsay's wide-ranging dedication to beekeeping, Laing said she still found herself impressed when his many contributions were outlined in a long-list in the ONZM recommendation. From assisting research, to industry advocacy, to mentoring fellow beekeepers and many contributions in between,



Frank Lindsay is all smiles (and perhaps some blushes too) as he passes through a guard of honour to the Johnsonville Community Hall for a Wellington Beekeepers Association meeting to recognise his New Zealand Order of Merit honour. Photo: Janine Davie.



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his honour was declared well and truly earned and overdue.

"Frank's contribution to our members is more than just how to practice beekeeping and apiculture, but to understand the bees and the world we live in," Laing said.

"We see you as our mentor, but you have taught us not to follow blindly, but to be observant to our bees and be guided by them," she told Lindsay.

Kos says when she first came into her role Lindsay was described as a "beekeeping guru" and "the fount of all beekeeping knowledge", "he proved to be all that", she declared. Kos praised his years of contributions to the New Zealand Bee Keeper Journal, saying his About the Apiary articles are still requested by beekeepers.

"This may also be an award for one person, but your sidekick Mary-Ann should be acknowledged too. She is pretty awesome," Kos said.

Auckland Beekeepers Club's Carol Downer sent in a message praising Lindsay's "clear, precise and engaging writing" while thanking him for assisting their club when called upon.

Neil Farrer of the SNIBG called the Lindsays "a very valued couple" and joked that their committee's biggest challenge is "keeping Frank on topic at meetings, because he just knows so much".

Given the scope of assistance offered to individual beekeepers and the industry on a wider scale by the Lindsays over almost six decades, it seemed only fitting that, when this out-of-town scribe was looking for a ride back into the city at the end of the night, it was the Lindsays who ended up playing taxi driver – another thankless job to add to a long list. And a highly educational journey it was too. 🐝



Frank and Mary-Ann Lindsay cut into an appropriately themed cake with an appropriately themed implement to continue celebrations at the Wellington Beekeepers Association. Photo: Janine Davie.

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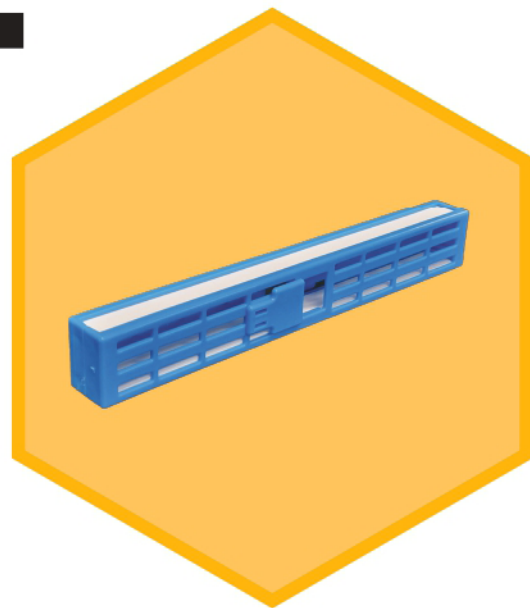
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Egmont Honey Moves to Correct Product Listing Errors



Egmont Honey chief executive James Annabell says an “administrative error” on the part of several online retailers which stock their new Dulce de Leche spread as “Honey” has been corrected.

The “creamy caramel spread”, as per the label, has been released under a separate Egmont Spreads branding, but Woolworths online store listed it as “Egmont Dulce De Leche Honey”, while Ottimo.co.nz ran with “Dulce de Leche (Egmont Honey) 450g” as their listing.

Dulce de leche is popular in Latin America as a sweet topping or filling for other foods. The Egmont spread includes corn syrup as an ingredient.

“This shouldn't have happened, as we have been very clear with not only our own branding of this new product, but also during its manufacture, to separate it from honey,” Annabell says.

“Despite this, a couple of retailers have made a mistake and, as soon as we were notified of their mistake, we moved to inform them and get it corrected. I assume the mistake has been made as the vendor numbers and supplier name is under ‘Egmont Honey.’”

Annabell points out that Dulce de Leche has not been labelled under the Egmont Honey brand, but under Egmont Spreads. It is even made and packaged at a separate facility to their honey packing.

“The idea was to leverage the fact that we are dealing with spreads buyers all over the world and try to capitalise on that. We are distinguishing our Dulce de Leche from others in the market by pointing out it is made from New Zealand grass fed cows’ milk. Taking the lessons we have learned from our unique honey, and trying to apply it to another sub-category in spreads.

“We don't write the product listings for the retailers. We supply a product description – and honey would not have been anywhere near that – nonetheless, a couple of people have jumped to conclusions and made a mistake. It is very early days for our Dulce de Leche spread, so it is good to get notified so such mistakes are fixed promptly,” Annabell says. 🐝

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Mānuka Orchard – Helping Beekeepers Take Control

While many beekeepers might be having difficulty selling their mānuka honey, Mānuka Orchard's honey improvement services are booked out weeks in advance and they are seeing client's honey sell. Owner Logan Bowyer gets great satisfaction from not just helping honey producers connect with honey buyers, but by first helping them add value to their product, before realising it.

While offers of \$6 or \$7 a kilogram for this season's bush honey crop might be forthcoming, accepting them straight off the bat may not be prudent, Bowyer warns beekeepers.

"Now is the time to be sitting down with somebody who knows what they are talking about and assessing what your honey looks like on paper to buyers and

thinking about the alternative options available to you, rather than just leaving your old honey in storage. If you have qualities in your new honey that can make your older honey A-grade and ready for sale, you are probably better to do that first," Bowyer advises.

At Mānuka Orchard they grade the honey held at their Bay of Plenty storage facility as either A, B or C grade. A-grade

is fully-tested honey that meets the specifications of all markets around the world, B-grade is fully-tested but not fully-compliant, while C-grade honey is untested and therefore an unknown quantity to any potential buyer.

Much of this season's bush honey that will be sold in the coming months will be used to blend with previous seasons' mānuka honey stocks to bring both up

Mānuka Orchard owner Logan Bowyer advises beekeepers to think twice before selling new season honey which could add value to their existing honey stocks.





Mānuka Orchard's 20-tonne blending tank in the Bay of Plenty, which can help beekeepers add value to their honey stocks.

to a more saleable, and valuable, product. Therefore by selling now, rather than using the honey to mix with their own standing honey stocks, beekeepers are missing out as they let others in the supply chain add the value.

"Test, evaluate and consider all options first," Bowyer advises.

"Packers are going to produce a certain amount of honey themselves, but most of them do not have a beekeeping operation large enough to produce all the honey they need for the year. So, bank on them using their own A-grade honey first and then in the second half of the year they will be buying in A-grade honey.

Mānuka Orchard has clients who this time last year took valuable steps to proactively manage their stock on hand through the services offered, made sales, and by mid-winter "had their feet up and were sunning themselves", Bowyer says.

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"There's beekeepers who work closely with us and they are now buying others' honey to blend and get themselves in the queue to sell, because the honey eventually does sell."

The Paengaroa-based facility also operates a sales platform, via www.manukaorchard.com, and also through a weekly mail-out to honey buyers detailing what is held at their facility. By getting to A-grade levels of testing and compliance, while also ensuring DHA:MGO ratios are favourable (3:1), honey is at the head of the queue.

"If any of your stock is less than A-grade, or it doesn't have that ratio of where the bulk of the buying is happening, then the first thing you should do is look within your own stock and assess whether there is anything you can do with your new honey to freshen up your old stocks," Bowyer says.

Honey buyers come knocking wanting honey at short notice and on a short turnaround time, and so honey needs to be ready to go ahead of time.

"We often are not given time by the buyer to test and blend and we don't

always have the capacity to blend at short notice, because we have a production schedule booked in advance," Bowyer explains.

Now is therefore the time to act and, while he and his team at Mānuka Orchard are 'all hands to the pump' at present, Bowyer says there is always time to help more beekeepers realise the value in their honey.

"There are sales to be had," he points out, adding "you just have to know how to hunt them down and be proactive to make it work." ■



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Sleeping in the Job



Do honey bees sleep? Almost certainly so, explains science writer Dave Black, but what do they achieve in sleep and how does that compare with other animals and humans? Here's what we know, and how you might be able to spot a slumbering bee.

BY DAVE BLACK

All animals sleep, but there the similarity ends. Or least all the multi-cellular animals that have been studied do, including sponges and jellyfish, worms, molluscs, insects, reptiles and amphibians, and birds and mammals. Sleep is not conditional on a brain. Now that could be because we haven't defined what it means to 'sleep' very well, (how does sleep differ from rest, or being comatose?) or possibly that sleep just happens, another name for when nothing happens and there is nothing to do, the clock is just running.

Sleep is different from rest, and not the same as a coma either. Our own experience knows it to be different, and when we look at other animals we recognise the immobility, reduced responsiveness, and reversibility that characterise sleep. We see dogs and children sleeping but clearly alive, and science can monitor electrical signals and body temperature or chemistry that mark 'sleep' and not 'awake', so definition isn't the problem.

If sleep wasn't important we would expect to find animals that don't sleep (we haven't, although there have been some

marginal cases), and that not sleeping would not have any harmful consequences (it does, even for bees). The genes at work are found in lots of other animals too. Most scientists, then, agree that that for all these diverse animals there must be some fundamental function or functions that sleep provides, they just don't agree what that is. Yet.

SOMNOLENT BEES

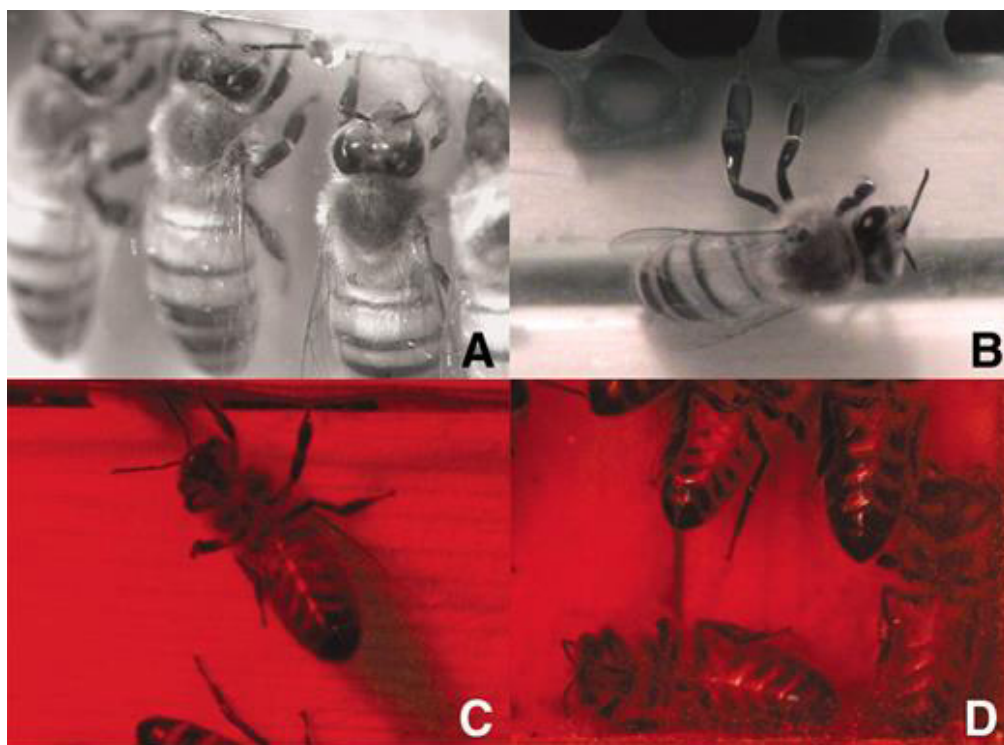
Honey bees sleep, although that's been contentious for the last hundred years. Observations in glass hives see bees, at least, resting. They look mostly immobile, but movement in their abdomen shows they are breathing. They have a characteristic posture, 'slumping' a bit down onto the surface of the comb. Their antennae retract a little and droop down. Puffs of air on the eyes will 'wake' them briefly.

In 1983 Walter and Jana Kaiser measured electrical signals from optical nerves in forager bees and found a circadian response rhythm and reduced sensitivity (an increased 'response threshold') to moving patterns near their eyes when they slept. If

they are prevented from sleeping (just keep shaking them every so often) they exhibit 'sleep-deprivation' by subsequently imprecise waggles, a greater tendency to get lost on the way home, forgetting tasks they were trained to do, and sleeping for longer when given the chance.

One insect studied in much more detail than honey bees have been is the fruit-fly *Drosophila*. The reason it is so closely studied is that it is possible to compare what is known about its biology and genetics to other animals, including other insects, and even people. In the last twenty years experiments with *Drosophila* have demonstrated pretty clearly the neuronal and genetic 'mechanics' for sleep and there is enough evidence to believe the same mechanisms are broadly applicable to honey bees too. So, honey bees do sleep.

Our picture is a little more complicated because of the honey bee 'caste' organisation, so not every individual bee behaves in quite the



Worker honey bees displaying typical sleep postures while relatively immobile, with limbs and body drooping in the direction of gravity. Bees exhibit a sleep state while (A) in groups, (B) isolated, (C) dangling motionless from tarsal claws, or (D) leaning against the observation hive wall or floor.



Drosophila, a much-studied fruit fly from which observations about other animals – including honey bees – can be made.

same way. Broadly, the bees that have not been outside sleep differently to the ones that do go outside; no surprises there. Younger bees generally slept inside vacant cells, not outside them, and closer to the centre of the nest. As they age and change tasks they gradually spend less and less time sleeping inside cells. Older worker bees generally sleep in cooler locations nearer the edge of the nest and away from uncapped brood. The average surface temperature of sleeping foragers themselves was lower than the surface temperature of their surroundings, another indicator of sleep.

SPECIAL, BUT NOT UNUSUAL

One other thing makes honey bees quite different from *Drosophila*. They have a 'home', a nest that is always in the same place filled with combs and food but which is not uniform or unchanging. Interestingly with *Drosophila*, environmental and social enrichment modify sleep patterns, and so does the size of the group. Group size is probably just a form of enrichment; group members inevitably interact and the added complexity of a larger group is itself 'enriching'. I'm saying 'interesting' because honey bees are large groups in rich environments, but also because it could be a clue to what the purpose of sleeping might be, and because the same thing happens to me! If sleep achieved one biological function (like recuperation) you would think to an observer the behaviour would appear quite uniform. Instead, particularly for animals in complex, rich environments (me at a party!) subsequent sleep is more lengthy, and marked by several periods of different behaviours.

DO HONEY BEES DREAM?

What purpose, could sleep serve? It's been thought for a long time that sleep is a form of rest; at a physical and neurological level a time to repair, re-fuel, and reset essential cellular processes, and a chance to sort, rank, and file experience. It's not clear that sleep is essential for these acts, or whether they merely make use of an opportune moment. It does seem plausible that different things happen in the different phases of sleep animals experience. For example, a deep or 'quiet' sleep may have an effect at a cellular level, allowing the elimination of waste materials, or 'topping-up' energy stores. An 'active' sleep phase might have more to do with processing the day's encounters. Honey bees have been shown to demonstrate different behaviours corresponding to different sleep

phases, including an 'active' or 'wakeful' stage, and given what we know from *Drosophila*, it's apparent small insect brains are at least as complex as higher animals like us when it comes to sleeping.

A fascinating article from 2021 (classified as 'Hypothesis and Theory')¹ proposes that the job of an animal's brain is to be a 'prediction machine'. A brain in active sleep is building and rebuilding models about its world to optimise an ability to predict the next event. Sleep periodically detaches a brain from the real world, allowing it to 'freewheel' through a greater range of predictions and outcomes than it would normally encounter (we might call it 'imagine'). An incorrect prediction (like a 'surprise') produces an 'emotional' response, an error correction mechanism that refines predictions by carrying value - a 'good' error, or a 'bad' error, or a 'meh!'. In an environment where change is inevitable an on-going tension between successfully predicting what happens next, but preserving surprise at novelty, is an essential adaption that keeps organisms aware, attentive, and learning. A honey bee's dreams may be doing exactly that, updating their model of life.

Dave Black is a commercial-beekeeper-turned-hobbyist, now working in the kiwifruit industry. He is a regular science writer providing commentary on "what the books don't tell you", via his Substack *Beyond Bee Books*, to which you can subscribe [here](#). 🐝

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1. Van De Poll Matthew N., van Swinderen Bruno, (2021) Balancing Prediction and Surprise: A Role for Active Sleep at the Dawn of Consciousness? *Frontiers in Systems Neuroscience*. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnsys.2021.768762>

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I see this a lot: very knowledgeable operators with decades of experience, hundreds of hives, maybe even a few thousand, extraction plant, and a few vehicles, making an income some would dream of, yet feeling exhausted, worn out, and disenchanted with the perpetual grind. They want out or to retire, but face the harsh reality of no interested buyers knocking at their doors.

BY DARREN BAINBRIDGE

I ask you to ponder what makes one business worth more than another, why one is more desirable and worth more than its peers? An important thing to keep in mind is, unless you are selling to another beekeeper, the very reasons you want out are the same deterrents for potential buyers.

Most buyers aren't going to value the types of assets you have amassed. Typically, those financially poised to make a purchase have been successful in a previous business. The second time

around, these types of people don't want to work in the business they're purchasing. They're looking for something that can operate passively, effectively an automated money-printing machine, or they know how to turn your business into an ATM.

To realize the dream lifestyle you yearn for, you need to adopt the mindset of a discerning buyer and strive to build the business these types of people are looking for. 'Easier said than done', I can hear you say. And yes, I am well aware the challenges many beekeepers are going through just to keep their business anywhere near in the black. Despite those huge challenges for many, it is still very worthwhile to keep long-term outcomes in mind, such as business succession planning, when making decisions in the short and medium term.

With that in mind, here's three things to think about in your business which I have learnt from my dealings with many beekeepers over the years.

1. Cultivate a Strong, Stable Second-tier Management

Businesses boasting a robust, ideally stable, second-tier management team inherently hold greater worth than those tethered to their owner's constant presence.

Regardless of your scale, a lack of managerial depth – no seasoned apiary manager, adept honey manager, or a staffer primed to assume such roles – puts a ceiling on your business's potential value and is key to freeing you to be able to live your dream lifestyle.

A buyer doesn't want a business where the owner is the business, and nor do you. This limits revenue growth and is what leads to burnout. Consider this litmus test: Could you go away on holiday for four weeks without calls and emails from panicked staff?

Instead of relying solely on your own efforts, learn to delegate tasks to capable employees, starting small, and gradually entrust them with more significant responsibilities to free up your time for strategic activities.

Invest this time in developing efficient systems and procedures that can be replicated and scaled. This might include standard operating procedures, record-keeping tools, and delegation strategies.

Darren Bainbridge





Start to empower your team to make decisions and take ownership of their roles, which fosters a culture of responsibility and accountability. Your goal here is to develop key employees into managers whom you can eventually hand responsibility for apiary and honey operations over to.

Despite being obvious, this is one of the hardest things to do and can instantly make your business more valuable and give you more free time.

2. Diversify Your Revenue Streams

Lay the groundwork for your team's growth by securing diversified income streams. Refrain from placing all your bets on a single facet of beekeeping, be it a specific pollination crop, or producing one type of honey.

The market and environment can change quickly; from frosted kiwifruit orchards cancelling pollination contracts to the tumultuous honey markets.

Explore opportunities to broaden your service and product offerings. Seek out niches where you can command a premium – whether through speciality honey variants, organic certifications, or alternative pollination contracts.

Increasing the value of your services is the key to being able to build and develop your team.

To help you with this, cultivate strong customer relationships by elevating your service quality. Listen to their feedback, address their concerns promptly, and maintain open lines of communication to build trust and loyalty over time.

3. Foster a culture of Innovation

Foster a culture of continuous improvement and adaptation within your organization, encouraging employees to identify opportunities for innovation and efficiency gains, capitalizing on their diverse perspectives and insights.

You will be amazed at what they come up with.

Look for productivity increases, perhaps some proprietary way of operating that keeps you ahead of your peers.

Stay agile and responsive to changes in the market landscape, and be willing to adapt your strategies and operations accordingly to maintain a competitive edge.

NO SILVER BULLETS

These concepts could mean significant changes in management practices, but they needn't come overnight. If nothing else, they should at least be kept in mind as decisions need to be made, whether they can be practically introduced or not.

If they can though, you might find your beekeeping business moving from a lifestyle business with you at the centre, to one where you can fit in as just another gear if needed, with one hand on the wheel steering it in the right direction, all the while building something more valuable.

Darren Bainbridge is founder and director of MyApiary, beekeeping management software and consultation. He has travelled extensively in the role, getting to know beekeeping business the length and breadth of New Zealand, as well as in Australia, USA, Canada and Europe over the past eight years. 🐝

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Caption Comp Winner



'Don't kiss me here Daisy,
my wife's watching'

We had more than a few chuckles at the calibre of cleverness from some of the readers when we floated the following photo of Kaimai Range Honey owner Ralph Mitchell, captured by his wife Jody Mitchell, calling for caption ideas last month.

Following consultation with the good-sport Mitchells, David Lang's caption has been crowned most fitting, with the fact that Jody took the photo getting it across the line ahead of several other clever contributions. Well done to all those who entered – there were some doozys! A two-dose pack of Formic Pro and a Pyramid Apiaries mated queen are on their way to Lang. 🐝



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Letter to the Editor



In reference to *Chalkbrood Explained*, in last month's *Advocate*. I have a different theory on why we are seeing more Chalkbrood present, (*Ascosphaera apis*).

Dr Mark Goodwin is correct that chalkbrood mainly shows in times of bee stress, mostly during the spring. After the initial introduction in Northland, it took only about three years before beekeepers were seeing it all over the country. It was particularly noticeable in *mellifera mellifera* (European dark bee) feral colonies. Some I removed from buildings had a 50% infection. Varroa arrived and within three years most of the ferals were gone and so were the black bees. Selective breeding (breeding from colonies with no infection) saw chalkbrood basically disappear.

About five years ago, I started seeing chalkbrood in some Wellington hives. These were hives I requeened with South Island queens, yet the beekeepers supplying the queens were not seeing chalkbrood in their colonies.

A few years later I heard a report from the Wairarapa that two of the three breeder queens from the South Island breeding programme came down with chalkbrood after their introduction.


In the Wellington Beekeepers Association hives this spring we had three colonies out of 16 showing chalkbrood. I have also seen it this season in two of my nucs (two out of the 20 I made to requeen colonies). I removed the heavily effected brood frames, combined these nucs and put in a virgin queen. Normally the bees will clean everything out of brood frames in preparation of the new queen beginning to lay, so most of the mummies should be removed.

Requeening of colonies with locally produced queens greatly assists, but you can sometimes see the odd chalkbrood larvae in the brood frames right through the season. Initially I thought the queens I was getting may have had a weakness for chalkbrood, but hearing that this was happening with other South Island queens, perhaps this indicates that the Wellington area had somehow become infected with a different variant of chalkbrood and that it had spread. Chalkbrood being endemic to New

Zealand is unlikely to be tested at MPI's lab, unless there is funding for such a project.

Nature doesn't stand still.

Frank Lindsay, Wellington.

Ministry for Primary Industries senior scientist Dr Richard Hall contributes: We had never looked at characterising chalkbrood; but it is something that had definitely been on our radar. It was something that Hayley Pragert and I had considered as a project task in the past. You will remember we looked at DWV-A (which we have in NZ) and DWV-B (which we did not find). A similar thing could be done for chalkbrood, it is a just a time/resource matter when doing such work. I will keep this idea in mind. 

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

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'letter to the editor' to
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Chalkbrood presenting on an otherwise healthy brood frame.

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A bit of Off-Farm Income and a Few Laughs with *Country Calendar*



This month's look *Inside Pyramid Apiaries* in Marlborough sees the beekeeping season winding down and a bit of 'off-farm' income sought before the honey cheque arrive, reports owner Patrick Dawkins.

BY PATRICK DAWKINS

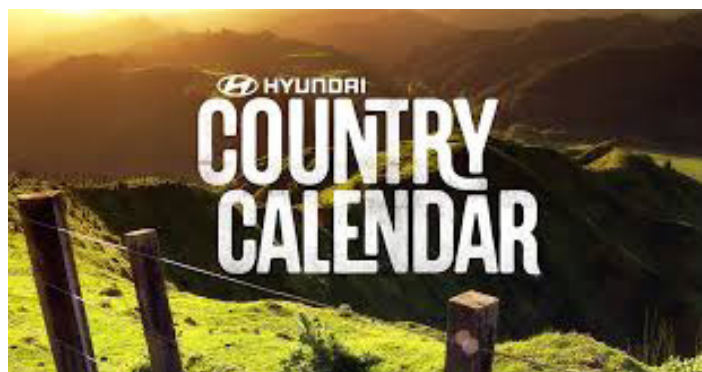
The nights are getting noticeably colder here in Marlborough and, as we all know, that means the queens are slowing their lay. Not such a bad thing after months of harsh dry in Marlborough, the region officially having reached drought status as of mid-February. A few less mouths to feed is not such a bad thing at this time of year.

Through March the management plan at Pyramid Apiaries looked a bit like this: stop them getting hungry, stop them getting varroa and stop them getting queenless, but I guess that is beekeeping in a nutshell!

We have a policy of uniting older or poorer performing queens in single brood box hives with singles holding younger queens at this time of year. Normally we try to locate the older queen first and take her out, but sometimes we just let the two of them figure it out, with a sheet of newspaper between the boxes. This reduces our hive numbers as we head into winter and gives us more



A change is as good as a holiday. With two tonne of pinot noir fruit on board the Pyramid Apiaries truck follows up a couple of months of honey carting with some work in the grape harvest in March.



The Country Calendar cameras rolling during some work outside of the business made for an entertaining few days break from the bees for Pyramid Apiaries owner Patrick Dawkins.

doubles for easier over-wintering and to go into pollination work come spring.

As for hunger, we have had the syrup tank on and any hives with no supers in place and sufficiently light brood chambers do get a squirt in a top feeder. Any hives with supers still on we let work through their honey stored there and we gradually remove the supers each round as they empty leading in to winter.

Varroa seems well under control this autumn, which is a nice feeling, with a front-line treatment in the hives and very little DWV or PMS seen thus far. After being bitten by varroa a few times in the past at this time of the season, we have learnt to be on our toes. That means monitoring for mites from late-January on and making sure fresh treatments go in before they are needed, because the situation can quickly change through February and March.

As for the mating units, we put the last of our cells out in March, having sold autumn mated queens. The big dry can limit the number of drones in hives once you roll into the second half of March, but luckily there was a surprising amount of the fellas late into the season despite the conditions. So, I'm hopeful the April check of matings before wintering down will not require too much uniting of failed units.

Yes, it's a nice feeling to be on top of things (I think...) this time of year and has even meant that, when the phone rings with people looking for help in the local grape harvest, I can help out a bit. This year, it was a 'handful' of days assisting the hand pick at a good friend's organic, biodynamic vineyard just up the road which provided some 'off-farm income'.

A change is as good as a holiday, they say, and with my arms still strong from the honey harvest and my back not yet fully shot, I threw a few baskets of grapes around while watching my nearby hives compete with the wasps for any exposed sugars left on the vine canopies.

For a few days I even realised my long-awaited destiny of on-camera stardom when the *Country Calendar* cameras arrived to capture the viticulture and wine-making story of the family business. It included cracking into a hive to remove some beeswax – a key ingredient for a biodynamic concoction – but mostly I imagine my stardom will extend to being the hunched over, older than his years beekeeper, stumbling around the back of shot trying to look busy while devouring expensive grapes. Look out for the Weavers and Churton Wines coming to TV1 on a Sunday night soon, theirs is a good story to be told.

As for this story, that's all she wrote this month, and hopefully things have got even slower in the hives by this time next month. 🐝



Productivity and Plans



BY IAN FLETCHER

We recently saw the end of the new Government's first hundred days' plan. At the same time, the quarterly GDP figures were published, showing a continuation of the gentle decline in per capita GDP, partly masked by very large numbers of migrants arriving.

This is our old problem of productivity: on a per person basis, we're getting poorer. Remember, productivity shows how efficiently we use resources (people and skills, land and its resources, and technology, infrastructure and investment).

Of course this may turn around by itself. But I don't consider we should count on good luck as a policy. As I've said before, we need to think hard about what to do. After all, if the economy gets moving for us all, then we have more resources, both individually and as a society to deal with issues of housing, health, police and crime, defence and so on. But it's going to be hard to tackle: moving from decline to steady growth in productivity will be a big effort.

SO, WHAT CAN WE DO?

Fortunately, other countries have faced economic crises before. There is now some systematic evidence of what seems to work in a national turnaround situation, such as we now face. The UK's Policy Exchange (a sort of policy research charity) has published



New Zealand needs to change the tax system to reduce the incentive to speculate on property, rather than invest more productively, says Ian Fletcher.



Systematic public investment in New Zealand's infrastructure is sorely required if we are to avoid creating a tyranny of distance within our own country.

a study, looking at the policy themes that underpinned an impressive list of national economic transformations.

They looked at Thatcher's Britain (1983-2007), Germany after the War (1945- 1973), France after the War (the so-called "Thirty Glorious Years" 1945-1973), Ireland (1981-2020), Poland (1990-2020), South Korea (1963-2007), Hong Kong (1962-1988), and Singapore (1959-2007). It's an impressive list of national success stories, and some quite remarkable turnarounds.

The first thing to say before we look at the lessons learned is that each of these countries might, to us, have appeared to face more acute economic (and often political) crises than we do. New Zealand today seems to face a chronic malaise, rather than an acute crisis.

But the truth is that we are gently getting poorer. As we do, our ability to tackle the (almost standard) list of challenges – housing, climate, health, schools, crime and justice, Māori partnerships and more besides – will get weaker, and we will face starker choices and harsh trade-offs.

THE MAIN THEMES

What did the Policy Exchange researchers conclude? They identified several themes among the countries they studied:-

Firstly, the big picture: success needs a broad strategy, not a detailed plan (things change too much to have long term plans). Leadership needs a team not just an individual, and a bit of luck helps: early wins combined with a clear vision of the future.

Secondly, the macro stuff: prudent spending and low inflation help, but aren't decisive. Tax can be important (but not always). But that's all, except for the crucial need to sustain and deploy high rates of saving and investment. The rest is micro stuff: strong competition policy and an open economy, education reform, infrastructure, employment rights and so on.

WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE NEW ZEALAND?

Crucially, short on savings and investment; perhaps over-focused on tax. And with a very weak competition policy – my personal measure of this is that we tolerate an intolerable duopoly in supermarkets, and a virtual cartel in banking, despite repeated studies showing how pernicious these arrangements are.

As well as seriously beefing up the Competition Commission, we need to boost Kiwisaver rates a lot, and change the tax system to



reduce the incentive to speculate on property, rather than invest more productively.

The case for wider tax reform is self-evident: the government cannot offer services that match (high-tax) Australia without collecting more. Skilled people will leave, as they are. A point often missed here is that unionised Australia allocates a higher share of national income to workers than New Zealand, making Australia relatively as well as absolutely more attractive.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Roads, rail, airports and so on. We live in a big, long, thin country. We often talk of the tyranny of distance in terms of our overseas markets; lack of investment at home creates a tyranny here we can and should correct with systematic public investment. The Crown has the best credit rating, and should use it. As I have said previously, I think New Zealand is over centralised. But it's worth remembering that the decision to centralise government back in 1875 was in the context of a major public works (ie infrastructure) programme. That was the political bargain then; we now risk the worst of both worlds: continued over-centralisation, with nothing to show for it.

FINALLY, THE DOG THAT DOESN'T BARK: DE-REGULATION

There's very little evidence that de-regulation itself helps productivity. Indeed, I recall a conversation some years ago with a German colleague in the European Commission, who commented that only English-speaking countries thought de-regulation helped productivity. Everyone else understood that intelligent regulation, well-designed, could provide signals for innovation and improvement. The key was good design, close consultation with affected industry, and a real willingness to change things through experience.

None of this requires a 100-day plan.

It does require an acknowledgment that solutions are possible but will take time, and some will be unwelcome, though necessary. Simple, "easy" solutions – like tax cuts – are likely to miss the point, distract everyone, and delay the inevitable.

It does require a competent and confident public service, willing to challenge and debate constructively, but also to then get on with the task of implementing and also monitoring results. We don't have that public service any more, and that means government of any party is just less effective than we deserve.



"New Zealand today seems to face a chronic malaise, rather than an acute crisis," concludes Ian Fletcher.

And finally, it does require a degree of national consensus around the need to tackle our economic performance, and a matching willingness to co-operate with the process of reform. But I think things will need to get a lot worse before we will be prepared to face up to the long-term challenges exposed by our weakening productivity story, and allow ourselves to have the future we all deserve.

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 expert 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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