

## Crisis in New Zealand.

There has been endless publicity over the last few years about bees disappearing from the earth. While this is true in some parts of the world in New Zealand we have the opposite problem. Beehive numbers have more than doubled since 2000 with most expansion in the last five years. There has been a large increase in hobbyist beekeepers, there are new commercial beekeepers and mid-sized beekeepers have increased hive numbers. The biggest change however is the establishment of corporate type beekeeping and they are changing the nature of beekeeping and putting the country at huge risk.

Honey is the lifeblood of the beekeeping industry but for the New Zealand economy it is insignificant compared to the value of honey bee pollination. Without honey bees there would effectively be no stone fruit, no pip fruit, no avocados, no berry fruit, no blueberries and no kiwifruit. A huge loss to the country's economy, but again, insignificant when compared to the most valuable crop pollinated by honey bees in New Zealand - Clover pastures.

The corporate beekeepers are trying to take over Hawke's Bay. They have no interest in pollination of clover or anything else. *They focus only on manuka honey production and are taking over business and bee sites.* The local beekeepers used to supply hives for crop pollination and clover flowers but the corporates do not. The corporates push thousands of hives into limited spring sites which beekeepers have used for generations to build up hives for pollination. The sites are overstocked. This is a serious problem leading to weaker hives, disease, increased costs and inability to get hives up to pollination standards.

Traditionally beekeepers respected each other's apiary sites because not to was unethical, uneconomical and *just plain stupid.* Accepted distances between apiaries were originally 2 miles but are now down half that as established beekeepers try to combat corporates ignoring ethics and common sense.

In many cases corporates are jamming hives in within a few hundred metres of existing apiaries in the hope that if someone has bees there it must be a good place - bad enough with normal sized apiaries but disastrous with apiaries 10 times bigger. They approach farmers and offer deals based on these inflated hives numbers that local beekeepers cannot match - because the local beekeeper has the history to know what an area can sustain. Borrowed money is being used to force out local beekeepers.

One Hawke's Bay beekeeper lost a site to a corporate who offered a cost\profit-sharing agreement to the land owner. *At the end of the season the farmer got a bill for \$15,000.* That's what happens when you put 200 hives where there should be 24. I assume farmers are occasionally paid what they are promised but I have lost count of the excuses I have heard for non-payment and promises not kept.

I was talking to a farmer at the Farm Market last week and he was irate that hives had been dumped on a neighbouring farm. When he asked the neighbour if he was aware that there were already bees on his property he was told yes but the new beekeeper had told them that beekeepers didn't mind other beekeepers being that close. **Newsflash - they do!** No farmer would like to feed 500 extra cattle dumped on their farm or a few thousand extra sheep.

I was talking to a farmworker who can't run down his own road for rugby training anymore - because a corporate beekeeper has dumped a huge site right beside the road - too lazy and too ignorant to manage correctly for public safety. I had another complaint that a corporate asked a lifestyle block owner for permission to put a few hives on their property - next morning 40 hives arrived.

Of even more concern are reports of stand over tactics being used to force existing beekeepers out of their areas. There is talk of threats to use hive dumping to over run the area if beekeepers do not sell up to the new corporate.

New Zealand's economy needs honey bees for pollination. A few local beekeepers do still make hives available for orchard and crop pollination. They charge for this service but it would be much better economics for them to just produce honey. These beekeepers continue to provide hives because they look at the long-term picture and they care about Hawke's Bay. They also try to ensure hives are available for farmers with clover pastures. *BEEWARE - they are being bought out or squeezed out at an alarming rate.* These beekeepers need farmers and land owners to support them. Check with your local beekeeping firms. Check with your neighbours. Don't accept bribes and false promises.

Honey prices are currently very high - particularly for manuka honey, but they are not high enough to compensate the growers and farmers of Hawke's Bay should the traditional beekeeper disappear leaving no one to provide honey bees for pollination.

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*Letter to the Editor, Bee Culture, America - August 2016; Courtesy John Berry.*