

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE HORTICULTURE DIVISION

### BEGINNING OF BEEKEEPING IN NEW ZEALAND AND BEEKEEPING LEGISLATION

The importance of agriculture to mankind is so fully acknowledged that we are not surprised at the attention given to it from the earliest period of man's history.

While other pursuits may offer greater prizes in the battle of life, especially during the past century, we almost invariably find the cultivator of the soil and the beekeeper more contented with his lot. His occupation besides supplying nearly all the comforts of life with many of its luxuries, also allows more freedom to express individual character and to live naturally in fairly close touch with nature.

In all walks of life men are to be found who are not satisfied to accept things as they find them and who continually strive to find new ways and better methods which tend to bring the fruits of the earth within easy reach of mankind.

Although there are two varieties of the bee family indigenous to New Zealand, neither of these are of any use as honey bees, consequently the very early settlers were unable to avail themselves of the abundance of nectar available in the native flora.

The first hive bees were brought to New Zealand from England in 1839 and were landed at Mangaranga, Hokianga, in March of that year. Later shipments were also successfully introduced in 1840 and in 1842. These were undoubtedly the first consignments of bees to successfully reach New Zealand.

Methods of beekeeping in the early days were cruel and wasteful, and were similar in nearly every respect to those employed in Britain at that time. A prominent feature of the primitive hive system in use was the sulphuring of the bees in most of the hives at the end of the season to obtain the honey they stored.

While some beekeepers followed the European fashion and constructed picturesque straw skep hives, the majority of settlers used common boxes or gin-cases with cross sticks running through them to support the combs.

Both these methods, however, necessitated the destruction of most of the bees at the end of the season to get the honey they produced.

The rude hives and implements then in use did not allow systematic work in the apiary nor did they allow the beekeeper to acquire an intimate knowledge of the life history and habits of the bees, so necessary to successful apiary management.

Further shipments of bees from Australia and America combined with the natural swarming tendency of the bees under uncontrolled conditions, soon furnished a large bee population throughout New Zealand.

Methods used to obtain the honey were very crude. The combs were crushed and placed in coarse cloth bags or sacking and hung up to drain. Continual squeezing would separate a good deal of the honey and the balance would be wasted.

Another method was to break up the combs of honey and place the whole in a boiler and heat until all was melted. When cool the honey was drained off into containers. This method destroyed the natural flavour and colour of the honey to a large extent.

The Maoris too, soon found that honey was a pleasing and desirable food. They obtained their supplies by finding bees' nests in the hollows of trees in bush areas and seldom troubled to strain or drain the honey. The older Maoris even to recent times preferred to eat a mixture of honey, wax, and bee grubs, just as it came.

These conditions continued until more and more early settlers arrived, when fruit-growing, beekeeping and vegetable culture began to attract attention on a semi-commercial basis, in addition to other agricultural pursuits.

For many years these industries proceeded along as best they could in a more or less disorganised fashion.

Insect pests and common diseases, once introduced, ran riot in almost undisturbed possession, due in the main to a general lack of knowledge and no responsible authority with power to deal with the situation.

The land and foundation stocks were here combined with a suitable climate for all kinds of agricultural products, but the settler required advice and guidance before he could avail himself fully of the new opportunities presented to him. The colonist therefore turned to the Government for assistance and so we find the provision of advisers and instructors followed by regulatory and inspection services established by popular demand.

It was soon realised, however, that a purely instruction service without power to enforce proper measures for the control of pests and diseases, was insufficient to foster rural industries, and in due course as conditions and public opinion demanded, suitable legislation giving the necessary powers of inspection and enforcement of regulations was built up.

The creation of the Department of Agriculture in 1892 was marked by the adoption of a progressive policy of instruction and encouragement in the development of agricultural resources, and a steady enlargement of the scope of the Department's activities took place in succeeding years.

Times were difficult and opinions were divided in regard to the necessity for legislation giving power to deal effectively with pests and diseases affecting rural industries. In 1896, however, powers to appoint inspectors and deal with orchard pests were taken under the Orchards and Gardens Pests Act which was passed that year.

The beekeeping industry next received attention through the appointment of Mr Isaac Hopkins as Government Apiarist in January, 1905.

Early in 1906 the first Apiaries Act was drafted and passed into law. This Act was amended the following year, and two Apiary Inspectors were appointed in 1908.

In many parts of New Zealand, the exhaustion of soil fertility caused primarily by the depletion of soluble minerals and the destruction or dissipation of humus, slowed down agriculture considerably for a time, and beekeeping suffered in consequence in areas that were considered suitable for the production of high quality honeys from white clover and mixed pasture sources.

Then came a new era for New Zealand farming. Soil exhaustion was overcome by manurial topdressing and in districts where rainfall has always been at a minimum, irrigation has given new life to country at one time considered almost barren and quite unsuitable for beekeeping.

In 1909 five major Departmental Divisions were created, including the Division of Orchards, Gardens and Apiaries. This Division dealt with the administration of:

1. The Orchards and Gardens Act, 1908.
2. The Apiaries Act, 1908.
3. The Produce Export Act, 1908, insofar as it is related to fruit, vegetables, hops and honey.



Improved conditions gradually became evident in the beekeeping industry, and when Messrs W. B. Bray and R. Gibb (the first inspectors appointed to work with Mr Hopkins) left the service to take up commercial beekeeping, four new inspectors were appointed.

Further assistance was given by the establishment of a State queen rearing apiary at Waerenga and later at Tauranga for the supply of queen bees of good strain and quality. The distribution of queens from these apiaries had a beneficial effect on the stocks of bees throughout New Zealand. This work was later carried on at Ruakura State Farm, Hamilton, together with the training of cadets in theoretical and practical beekeeping.

In 1915 further assistance was provided by the introduction of compulsory export grading regulations. This gave confidence to overseas buyers of New Zealand honey and protected the industry against packers who might possibly ruin our overseas trade by careless packing or supply of inferior quality honey.

Here you have some of the background to the beekeeping industry as we know it to-day.

During the past three years every endeavour has been made by the Department to bring beekeeping legislation in New Zealand, based on the Apiaries Act, 1927, up to date.

This has been done in stages as circumstances demanded and after full consultation with the Executive of the N.B.A. and producer representatives connected with the Honey Marketing Authority of the day.

#### Beekeeping legislation at present:

##### 1. Apiaries Act, 1927.

##### 2. The Apiaries Diseases Order, 1950.

This order declares the disease known as *Nosema apis* and the bee louse (*Braula coeca*) to be diseases within the meaning of the Apiaries Act, 1927, and thus gives the Department better control over the importation of bees under authority of a permit granted by the Minister of Agriculture.

##### 3. The Honey Export Regulations, 1950.

These regulations consolidate with some amendments the old regulations governing the grading of honey for export, and bring them into line with present-day requirements.

##### 4. Apiaries Amendment Act, 1951.

Section 2—Gives power to an Inspector to proceed against any person who refuses to remove bees established in buildings owned or occupied by him, within a specified time.

Section 3—Relaxes previous restrictions on the movement of disease-free bees and apiary appliances by a beekeeper between his registered apiaries, for management purposes.

Section 4—Makes it an offence to sell or to give away any honey from hives infected with disease.

Section 5—Enables prevention of the introduction of any undesirable strains of bees.

##### 5. The Apiaries Regulations, 1952.

Deals with the importation of bees into New Zealand and the keeping of bees in any prohibited area.

##### 6. Apiaries Amendment Act, 1953.

Requires beekeepers to keep the normal access to the hives in

an apiary clear from obstructions caused by the growth of vegetation which would impede or prevent inspection of the bees for disease control purposes. Also prohibits the spraying of fruit trees, and berry fruit plants, e.g., raspberry, strawberry, boysenberry or loganberry plants, during the blossoming period with any preparation containing any poisonous substance injurious to bees.

#### 7. The Apiary Registration Regulations, 1953.

Simplifies apiary registration procedure and associated work. The registration of apiaries is now decentralised to offices of Apiary Instructors.

#### BEEKEEPING BULLETINS AND PAMPHLETS AVAILABLE

The following bulletins and pamphlets prepared by officers of the Department in recent years are available to beekeepers:

Bulletin No. 267—"Beekeeping in New Zealand," 2/6 post free.

Bulletin No. 242—"Bee Diseases" (free).

#### Pamphlets:

Plan of Stanard Hive Equipment.

Honey House Construction and Layout (six plans).

Use of Pollen Supplements in New Zealand.

Diseases of Bees in New Zealand.

Production of Honey Mead from New Zealand Honey.

Observations on the Treatment of Nosema Apis with Drugs.

Conditioning of Bees to Control Pollination.

Effect on Honey Bees of D.D.T. plus Superphosphate applied as a Dust with Clover Pasture.

#### Available soon:

Vacuum Plant for Removing Excess Moisture from Honey.

—T. S. WINTER,  
Superintendent, Beekeeping Industry.

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