

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE HORTICULTURE DIVISION

CONFERENCE ADDRESS BY MR T. S. WINTER, Superintendent, Beekeeping Industry.

I appreciate very much the opportunity given me to address this Conference and I would like to thank Mr Greig, Director of Horticulture Division, for his gesture in asking me to speak in his stead on this occasion.

At your Conference last year Mr Greig gave you a very comprehensive survey of the set-up and overall activities of the Department in giving service to the beekeeping industry.

Today the Minister of Agriculture, in opening this Conference, gave you information regarding the status of the beekeeping industry in New Zealand and also touched on the work of the Department during the past year.

I intend therefore to range briefly over a fairly wide field covering the affairs of the industry and to quote certain figures regarding the disease situation, production and marketing—leading up to points I wish to make which are of importance to you.

Inspection of Apiaries: It has been stated that new methods for dealing with bee diseases introduced in 1951 are now showing excellent results in the control and eradication of foulbrood, which is reduced to less than 1 per cent. of the hives inspected last season in some of the main honey producing districts, and appreciably reduced in other areas. District reports show a downward trend since 1951, as follows:—

Auckland	1951/52	3.15%	Last season	1.2%
Hamilton	"	3.35%	" "	.8%
Tauranga	"	3.58%	" "	2%
Palmerston North	"	5.46%	" "	1.6%
Hawera	"	.89%	" "	.49%
Hastings	"	4.6%	" "	3%
Christchurch	"	3.38%	" "	1.8%
Oamaru	"	3.42%	" "	1.8%
Invercargill	"	3.7%	" "	1.7%

No reports are to hand this year from Greymouth.

The position shown here is very pleasing, but unfortunately the rapid improvement in the foulbrood situation appears to have given some beekeepers a false feeling of security, including some Part-time Inspectors, who have done good work but who now show some reluctance to continue with the work.

I am somewhat perturbed about this, as now is definitely not the time to ease up on the job. A strong follow-through on present lines for at least another two seasons is essential. We could then take another look at the overall situation and see whether we should change our present policy in any way.

Quite frankly, I would say that if producers continue to lose interest in this work it would be physically impossible for Apiary Instructors to cover the ground effectively each year, in which case foulbrood would again become the problem it was a few years ago.

I would therefore strongly urge all Branches of the National Association to continue to co-operate with the local Apiary Instructor in this matter and to see that sufficient competent beekeepers offer themselves for the work each season.

Another aspect regarding the inspection of apiaries (which has been mentioned in your Journal) is the difficulty experienced by Apiary Instructors in establishing the ownership of some apiaries.

This difficulty would be overcome if every producer used a one-inch stencil to place his name on the outside of one hive in each of his out-apiaries.

Any compulsory system, however, whereby beekeepers would use a distinguishing mark allotted to them would involve the Department in a lot of extra work, which should be avoided if possible.

This matter will be taken up with your Executive to see whether any voluntary arrangement with beekeepers to mark their out-apiaries in some way would be likely to succeed.

In a total of 12,530 registered apiaries there are approximately 5300 out-apiaries.

Another matter which has a bearing on disease control is
Efficiency in Apiary Management

I would like to give a warning here. It is not my intention to put the spotlight on any individual producer but to point out that there is a tendency for some producers to take on far more colonies and apiaries than they can manage efficiently with available staff. In such cases running costs are kept down by making comparatively few visits to each apiary—and hoping for the best.

In the aggregate large crops may be produced in that way, but where capable staff is not engaged in sufficient numbers the effects to a large extent would be:

- (a) Very low average production per hive.
- (b) To occupy large areas of territory capable of producing much more honey each year.
- (c) A high percentage of undesirable swarming, resulting in trouble to neighbouring producers and also to the Department in extra work involved in taking care of stray swarms and keeping down the incidence of foulbrood. Fortunately there is little of this at present, but where it occurs it is not in the best interests of the industry as a whole.

ACARINE DISEASE

As many of you know, Acarine disease is caused by a mite which enters the breathing tubes of the bee, punctures the walls of the tubes and lives on the juices of the bee.

Infected bees become weakened and frequently colonies and whole apiaries succumb to the disease.

Acarine is the most serious of all bee diseases and is widespread in Britain and on the Continent. Fortunately this disease does not occur in New Zealand, but the seriousness of the position has been shown by a recent report that acarine disease has reached the Argentine.

Our concern is to see that every precaution is taken to prevent it reaching here and if it does to deal drastically with it.

We have a fairly watertight set-up to ensure that only disease-free bees are allowed into the country and only from countries where acarine disease is not known to exist, but we have no power at present to deal as effectively as we would like with any apiary where it is found following the introduction or illegal entry of bees.

We may need something along the lines of the recently gazetted Plant Diseases Regulations, 1954, which give the Department power to eradicate any new disease introduced into the country before it becomes properly established, and if necessary to destroy crop and plants over a wide area in order to achieve this.

There is also power to declare an infected area, and to restrict the movement of any likely carriers of the disease, etc.

With regard to acarine disease, the Department would be prepared to sponsor suitable regulations that would give power to set up a suitable organisation and have plans ready to swing into action immediately if and when acarine disease is discovered here.

Nothing would be done, however, without first-hand information on control measures and treatment, which can only be obtained at Rothamsted Experimental Station in Britain, and not without full consultation with and approval of your Executive.

HONEY MARKETING CONDITIONS

As you know, the Horticulture Division has no jurisdiction in the marketing of honey, but we are often called in by merchants and retailers to advise on the condition of honey held in store for long periods, and what can be done with it, etc.

We do see many expensive mistakes being made by producers, merchants and retailers alike in handling this commodity.

I feel therefore that it would be appropriate at this time for me to give you a picture of affairs as I see them and to make suggestions for an improvement in overall marketing conditions.

First let us take a look at production figures and marketing of honey overseas by countries who compete with us on the export market and see how we can improve our position generally.

AUSTRALIA

The main honey producing States are New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.

According to a report by P. D. Mantle, in "Food Industries Weekly":

The number of semi-commercial and commercial beekeepers in Australia in 1953 was about 7000, operating a total of 305,000 productive colonies of bees.

In 1952-53 Australia exported in round figures 7400 tons of honey.

The United Kingdom was the main customer, taking 6750 odd tons. Western Zone of Germany took 300 odd tons, and the balance went to a variety of overseas markets.

The amount of honey consumed in Australia per head of population has been estimated at something like 1.3lb., including the honey used in confectionery and for other manufacturing purposes.

Australian honey is sold for less than New Zealand honey on the United Kingdom market. She can do this—firstly, because her average production per colony is greater than New Zealand, and secondly, because the overall quality of their honey is different from the New Zealand product.

These facts, however, do not help us any, but they do have a bearing on our welfare.

U.S.A.

According to the annual report of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, honey production in U.S.A. in 1953 totalled in round figures 100,000 tons, 18 per cent. less than the previous year, and the smallest crop since 1948.

It is of interest to note that the 1953 crop was produced from 5,533,000 colonies of bees, and that the average production of honey per hive that year was 40.5lb.

The comparatively short crop in 1953 resulted in cancellation of the export subsidy programme in mid-year, when 11,160 tons had already been approved for export.

An amount of 11,160 tons of U.S. price-supported honey—plus 7400 tons of low-priced Australian honey exported to the United Kingdom that year—had its effects on the sale of New Zealand honey overseas.

It has been announced that price support for U.S. surplus export honey will be continued during the 1954 marketing season. The rate of payment this year will be 3.75 cents per lb. (3.24d), as compared with 4 cents per lb. last year.

High authorities tell us that as living standards improve in many overseas countries the demand for our foodstuffs will increase by leaps and bounds. That may be, but in the meantime we have to carry on and live within our own economy.

The overseas markets may be able to take increasing amounts of honey annually, at a price, but the present trend calls for caution and skill in the matter of our export honey and **more attention to building up consumption at home.**

To maintain stability within the industry it is sound business to draw off to export all honey that is surplus to local requirements, but I do suggest that more could be done to increase consumption locally. You must watch, however, that in the process you do not drag down prices to uneconomic levels by over-supply to merchants and to retailers who may be forced to drop prices to clear old stocks.

Unfortunately there is a tendency for some producer packers to dispose of their entire crop each year for delivery in one lot. In these circumstances honey is often held for long periods under poor storage conditions resulting in deterioration and losses that could be avoided.

Spread delivery would give the producer better control over the condition of his product and would provide a more steady flow of packed honey on to the market, and tend to keep prices more stable.

Grain in Honey

Enquiries are received each year for information regarding coarse grained honey on the market, the reason for this and what can be done with it, etc.

Any coarse grained honey is a drag on the local market and retards sales generally over all packs. This is an important matter and a simple problem that could be overcome by all producer packers.

Scum

I also receive enquiries from the Trade regarding scum and wax particles on the surface of some packages returned by customers. It is obvious that some packers do not give sufficient attention to their honey, and that they allow the last of the tank to go through without regard to its condition.

It is bad practice and may turn many good customers away from honey.

Storage of Honey

Some merchants and many retailers give little attention to correct storage of honey in stock and even when on display. I do think that information and advice to wholesalers and to retailers on this subject is necessary to prevent losses that occur frequently under present

conditions. This could be done by leaflet when sales are made and when accounts are rendered, or by information pasted on each delivery case.

Fermentation in Honey

It is surprising the quantity of honey lost to the trade each year because of fermentation. Care in handling and more orderly marketing along the lines I have suggested would largely take care of this problem.

It would be good long-term policy for producers to follow a system of regular enquiry regarding the condition of stocks held by the Trade and to replace any of their honey that has deteriorated below the usual standard. A high standard of cleanliness, freshness and condition brings back customers more regularly.

I feel that by judicious advertising and by telling the public generally the many ways honey can be used, also by giving careful attention to other matters I have mentioned, you may find the local market will take the bulk of your production in the next decade.

A steady increase in our population will provide further scope for your endeavours in that direction as the years go by.

Honey Production in New Zealand Last Season

Overall production of honey from commercial and domestic apiaries for the year ended 31st March, 1954, was estimated at 6447 tons.

A break up of that total by districts, also North and South Island production, is of interest and may be helpful to producer packers and others in their marketing arrangements.

Commercial Group, 30 hives and over—

Auckland, including North Auckland	700 tons
Hamilton	1152 "
Tauranga	455 "
Hastings	460 "
Hawera	325 "
Palmerston North	448 "
West Coast-Nelson	190 "
Christchurch	875 "
Oamaru	680 "
Invercargill	430 "
Total	5715 "

To which is added 732 tons from apiaries under 30 hives.

North Island production last season	4119 tons
South Island production last season	2328 "

Production and sales this year should be a good guide to local market possibilities, and a guide to the draw-off to export required to stabilise conditions here.

N.B.A.

A dangerous trend in recent years of comparative prosperity in the beekeeping industry is the lack of interest shown by many producers in the affairs of the industry.

It is not realised, I am sure, by many beekeepers the importance of maintaining a strong organisation to represent the industry in all matters requiring an approach to the Government.

I can say as a Departmental officer partly responsible for making recommendations to the Department for presentation to and consideration of the Government in matters of law relating to beekeeping and work to foster and protect the industry that without the backing of a representative body such as yours, we would not get very far.

To get the best out of your occupation and chosen way of life, and for further progress, I would say that—at this critical period in your affairs—a special effort now by Branches to stir up greater interest in the work of the N.B.A. and to build up your strength as far as possible appears to be essential. Make this a real working Conference of fair comment and discussion of your problems, and when decisions are taken get in behind your Executive and assist them to implement your wishes as far as possible.

BEEKEEPING INSTRUCTION COURSE

Arrangements have now been completed by the Department for a central two-day instruction course for beekeepers to be held in the Bay Hall, Timaru, on Wednesday and Thursday, 15th and 16th September next, beginning at 9.30 a.m. each day.

The South Canterbury Branch of the National Beekeepers' Association have arranged for a meeting of producers to be held on the evening of Thursday, 16th, and for a field day to be held at the home apiary of Walter Watson & Co., Greshams Road, Geraldine, on Friday, 17th September.

The following subjects will be dealt with by Departmental officers, and additional items will be given at the field day by leading honey producers:—

Installation of cool rooms.

Honey house construction.

Removal of excess moisture in honey.

Preparation of honey by producers, grading and use thereafter.

Standard methods of apiary management.

Effect of DDT phosphate on honey bees.

Selection of breeding strains of bees.

Practical working demonstration of artificial insemination of queen bees.

Use of package bees in the South Island.

Comb honey production.

Arrangements have been made for morning and afternoon tea to be served each day at the Bay Tea Rooms. Beekeepers are urgently requested to notify the Apiary Instructor, Department of Agriculture, Oamaru, who is in charge of local arrangements, how many in his family will attend, including himself, for the information of the caterers. (The price for teas will be 1/9 per serving.)

All beekeepers are cordially invited to attend.

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