Department of Agriculture

Horticulture Division

ADDRESS BY A. M. W. GREIG, DIRECTOR, HORTICULTURE DIVISION, DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, AT THE OAMARU CONFERENCE

Introduction

During the past year, Mr. President, I was privileged to act as Chairman of the Beekeeping Assessment Committee and that experience has added to my knowledge of your industry and of your problems. You have always been renowned for your individuality which I respect but many of your problems, such as toxic honey, or the impact of agricultural chemicals, can only be tackled in a joint or partnership manner not only in association with fellow beekeepers but also with workers in associated fields such as the research, advisory, regulatory, marketing or administrative aspects of the Beekeeping Industry.

Today the most important economic fact facing all New Zealanders is that the volume and value of our exports must be increased to a marked degree if our standard of living is to be maintained. The Beekeeping Industry is playing a part. I believe it could play a bigger part and Government is seriously interested in any way in which your products could earn more overseas.

Production

Last season's production for the year ending May, 1963, was approximately 5900 tons compared with 5400 tons average. Except for the West Coast-Nelson area, all South Island districts were above average—the figures for Canterbury being 1040 tons compared with 770 tons average, and for South Canterbury-North Otago (based on Oamaru) 1025 tons compared with 625 tons average—these two districts alone raising the Dominion average by 670 tons. We are therefore meeting today in Oamaru in one of the most important honey producing districts in the Dominion. Beekeeping is closely linked with agricultural practices and the fortunes of beekeepers usually fluctuate according to farming trends. Two current local changes are the development of pastures in certain high country areas and the increased acreage in wheat production. Two questions are posed—will the high country eventually provide stable honey producing areas and will the expanded acreage in wheat affect beekeeping?

Grading

For many years the grading of honey for export and on receipt at the Auckland grade store has been by the Honey Grader of the Department of Agriculture based on three factors—flavour, colour and condition and a composite grading was based on these three factors in the ratio: 45 flavour, 35 colour, 20 condition. On this basis, flavour was of major significance in grading and the grader was required to grade into one of 18 classifications: 60, 65, 70, 75, 80, 85, 87, 90 and at each level from 91 to 100. Discussions have been held with the Honey Marketing Authority and the joint recommendation of the department and the Honey Marketing Authority is to reduce these 18 classifications down to six by a grouping or broad banding—as follows:

Extra Delicate	....	100 points
Delicate	....	95 points
Mild	....	90 points
Medium	....	80 points
Strong	....	75 points
Extra Strong	....	70 points

A new term, Extra Delicate, has been introduced, the meaning of the flavour terms when converted into points—has been altered. The current procedure for defining colour by the Pfund Colour Classifier would continue (out of 100 points) and the condition would also remain based on the body of the honey, the presence of any defects and its cleanliness, and be graded out of 100 points.

The weighting of these three factors, 45: 35: 20, would be abolished and any weighting necessary to determine payments would be the responsibility of the Honey Marketing Authority.

To put these proposals into effect will require an amendment to the Honey Export Regulations, 1950, and before I make such a recommendation I would appreciate the views of the National Beekeepers' Association.

Bacillus Larvae

On October 17, 1961, a special joint meeting was held in Wellington to discuss the eradiction or control of Bacillus larvae disease. The full implementation of the recommendations from the meeting has not yet been carried out primarily because other major problems such as Tutu and toxic honey have had to be given priority. However, arrangements are in hand for the implementation this year of the Committee's recommendations. These include an educational campaign regarding recognition of the disease and notification by property owners of unsupervised or wild hives on their properties and furnishing of inspection declarations by beekeepers. In general, beekeepers will be advised when inspections have been made in their apiaries; and also the procedure to be adopted for dealing with diseased hives when found by inspectors. The provisions of the Apiaries Act relating to the transfer of hives and equipment to new sites are to be enforced. Normal field inspection has continued and reports indicate that the overall incidence is low but in some southern areas, relatively widespread. Diseased colonies of bees established in buildings and in trees appear to be the major sources of disease.

A Review

At your Annual Conference last year I gave a review of the problem of tutu and toxic honey. This review was published in full in the "New Zealand Beekeeper," August, 1962.

During the past season, by field observations, technical officers of the Department observed passion vine hoppers secreting honey dew on tutu plants in various localities. The Department therefore issued a circular to all beekeepers in the North Auckland, Coromandel and Bay of Plenty districts, emphasising that it was important for all honey harvested after January 1, 1963, to be used for beefeeding purposes and not offered for human consumption.

At the same time honey from test hives throughout these districts was collected and forwarded to the laboratory for check testing with guinea pigs as was indicated last year. This check testing procedure would only give results after the normal prudent beekeeper had harvested his honey for marketing. The tests could not be available till after the season's operations were completed.

You will recall also, that 12 months ago I emphasised how essential it was for each beekeeper to know the sources of his honey in case toxicity was found in a sample of his straight production or blended honey. This meant adequate coding of honey extracted so that all retail and wholesale packs could, if necessary, be traced back to their origin.

During the past fortnight, I am sorry to say, the Medical Officer of Health, Hamilton, reported that a child had shown mild symptoms of honey poisoning and there was circumstantial evidence that honey was involved. I repeat what

I said a year ago—"I am aware that untold harm could be done to your industry if the public as a whole came to regard honey with suspicion and if any consumer digestive upsets where the cause was not really diagnosed, were unnecessarily attributed to honey."

You will recall that in 1961-62 season most suspect honey was impounded and subsequently destroyed. The greatest difficulty was experienced, and continued to be experienced in determining beforehand and afterwards, what honey must be regarded as suspect. Also it is not possible to determine by guinea pig or chemical test, whether any honey produced in a passion vine hopper—tutu zone is completely free from toxicity. I am aware that there is a real responsibility on all concerned—to safeguard human health and at the same time not jeopardise commercial beekeeping.

In this instance, action is being taken to hold suspect honey until sufficient facts are available and the appropriate action determined.

Last year I indicated that entomologists were confident that biological control of the passion vine hopper is feasible and could result in a practical solution within five to seven years. During the past season Dr. R. Cumber has studied the situation in New Zealand and his interim report is less optimistic regarding biological control because some parasitism already exists in New Zealand. However, it is now intended that Dr. Cumber visit Australia during the 1963-64 season to study the situation there, where I understand the passion vine hopper has never reached the numerical strength it shows in New Zealand. It is still hoped that there is an additional parasite in Australia which is not recorded in New Zealand and that such a parasite, if introduced, could make a marked reduction in the number of hoppers in New Zealand.

Staffing

The apiary section of the division is one of the smallest and most specialised as it works entirely on beekeeping problems. The approved establishment is 15, consisting of 1 Superintendent, 1 Honey Grader, 2 Apiculturists and 11 Apiary Instructors. This section has suffered severe losses during the past 12 months through the death of Mr. D. Roberts, Honey Grader; the retirement of Mr. C. R. Paterson, Apiculturist, and the resignation of the section's first professional officer or university graduate, Mr. G. Jeffery. No member of the section is prepared to accept the responsibilities and duties of the previous Honey Grader. It is hoped that the proposed simplified grading procedure in relation to flavour testing may make the situation less acute, but the Department's responsibilities in regard to honey grading may require to be redefined. The resignation of Mr. Jeffery re-emphasises my sense of disappointment in an inability to attract, train and retain apicultural cadets as the future advisory staff for beekeepers. No occupational group has yet been established for Apiary Instructors so the recruitment of beekeepers as Instructors remains difficult within the terms we are allowed to offer.

In view of a continuing difficulty in obtaining and retaining an Instructor for the West Coast-Nelson-Marlborough with headquarters at Greymouth and to provide a balanced service we have made recommendations for a transfer of headquarters for this district from Greymouth to Nelson.

On April 1, 1963, the four Assistant Horticultural Superintendents at Hamilton, Hastings, Nelson and Dunedin were promoted to the status of full Superintendents. The effect of this change on apiary section staff is a shortening of the line of control on non technical matters between the individual and Head Office and vice versa. All horticultural Superintendents are responsible to the Director whereas previously the Assistant Superintendents were responsible to a Horticultural Superintendent.

You will be pleased to hear that an offer has been made to an overseas applicant for the position as Scientific Officer, Wallaceville, as assistant to Mr. Palmer-Jones on beekeeping problems and research work associated with them.

National Diploma in Apiculture — N.D.Ap.

You are aware that by an amendment to the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture Act and subsequent gazette notice the Institute is authorised

to award diplomas in apiculture to those who study for and sit certain examinations after a period of practical beekeeping. It is hoped that future Apiary Instructors of the Department will have gained this qualification before appointment and I trust that the N.B.A. will give the younger men in the industry encouragement to study and qualify for this diploma. It is customary when establishing this type of diploma to grant exemptions to those who have had a lifetime of experience but who have passed the age when anyone would expect a man to sit an examination. These honorary diplomas or diplomas without examination are restricted to persons over 40 years of age who have had over 20 years' experience in beekeeping and who are recognisd as competent practical men who have earned the respect of their fellow beekeepers and who have been nominated and accepted nomination for this award. Final authority for the Institute to make such awards expires on September 8 so any further nominations must be forwarded at once for consideration. A supplementary list is being prepared and will be issued after approval by the Examining Board of the Institute. In the meantime, I am pleased to bring this Award to your notice and officially, on behalf of the Institute to announce that the following 26 persons have been awarded the National Diploma of Apiculture (without examination).

NATIONAL DIPLOMA IN APICULTURE (without examination)

N.D.Ap.

Southland

R. C. ABERNETHY, Owaka
W. C. CALDWELL, Invercargill
J. W. FRASER, Invercargill
N. E. GLASS, Gore
J. GLYNN, Balfour
W. T. HERRON, Gore
R. H. HOBBS, Gore
J. S. SPENCE, Gore
G. F. TOOGOOD, Gore

Otago and South Canterbury

E. O. BALL, Waimate
R. D. BENNIE, Ranfurly
H. CLOAKE, Timaru
R. DAVIDSON, Timaru
I. W. FORSTER, Oamaru
J. FORSTER, Timaru
J. G. McKENZIE, Waimate
A. H. SIMPSON, Geraldine
J. H. WATSON, Geraldine

Canterbury — F. J. ARMSTRONG, Christchurch

Westland — R. V. GLASSON, Blackball

Manawatu — F. F. WILSON, Otaki

Hawkes Bay — W. J. C. ASHCROFT, Havelock North
J. McFADZIEN, Havelock North

Wanganui — E. J. WHALLEY, Wanganui

Taranaki — W. G. BASSETT, New Plymouth
J. LLOYD, Manaia
M. H. OLSEN, New Plymouth

Waikato — B. W. FORSYTH, Ohaupo
J. D. LORIMER, Hamilton
H. N. TUCK, Kihikihi

Bay of Plenty — J. H. LOWE, Tauranga

Auckland — W. W. NELSON, Takapuna
L. RIESTERER, Papatoetoe

Northland — W. I. HAINES, Kaitaia