

Presidential address

by Percy Berry, president, National Beekeepers Association of New Zealand.

IN MY ADDRESS to Conference last year reference was made to the fact that much had changed for the better. I am now pleased to report that our association has made further progress towards political and financial stability.

Unfortunately in the marketing area which falls outside the control of this association the industry is currently embroiled in one of its periods of political confusion. If we fail to put this matter right immediately there could well also be another period of economic collapse.

In the past three years we have made a remarkable recovery from poverty to prosperity. This has been achieved by many people working together for the good of the whole industry. The present lapse is regrettable. Later in this address I will suggest a solution. During 1977-78 New Zealand beekeepers have been favoured with one of the better production years. Although production costs have risen, better prices are being received and this is being reflected in greater confidence and greater investment in the business of beekeeping.

There is room for greater honey production in New Zealand, particularly from bush nectar sources. During my recent visits overseas I have been surprised to find the extent of the prospective markets for New Zealand honey in general.

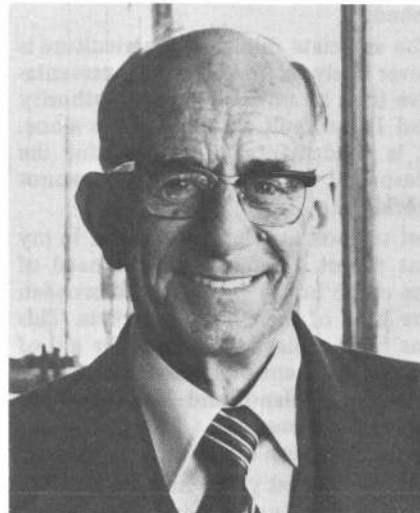
Most of our so-called problem honeys which we have in the past used for feeding our bees may well become a problem only in the sense that we are not able to produce enough to meet the demand. For instance, I would expect the dark-coloured rewarewa honey to take its place alongside our clover honey in popularity. The industry is of course famous for the quantity and quality of the clover honey produced from comparatively small areas.

At a time when our country is experiencing a downturn in its economy it is encouraging that our small industry is making some worthwhile contribution in increased production and exports. During the year the association and others applied for increased exports taxation incentive on exports of retail packs of extracted honey.

Approval has now been granted and exports from April 1, 1978 qualify for incentives. This should encourage both exports and production.

The Honey Marketing Authority, of which I am a member, has been finding some difficulties in financing against the additional value of its throughput. The industry seems to qualify for, and seems entitled to expect, full support from Treasury. If this is not available I have suggested other means of financing.

I understand the subject is one the chairman of the Honey Marketing Authority will deal with more fully in his address.



Percy Berry

During the past year a number of beekeepers have journeyed overseas and a very large contingent attended the Apimondia Congress held in Adelaide last October. The next such congress will be held in Athens in 1979.

It is gratifying to find that beekeeping as a hobby is appealing to more people. Recreation is no longer the only reward. The trend for many years was toward larger holdings. As the economics of beekeeping improves the need for larger numbers of hives diminishes. I suggest that the minimum economic unit for beekeeping is now less than 1 000 hives. In some selected localities less than half that number, intensively farmed, could keep one man fully employed and reasonably well paid for his labours.

These circumstances can continue only if we make the best of our marketing opportunities. Recently I have given much thought to what I have referred to as the current political confusion. The present situation is quite apparent from recent publications.

I have searched for a solution in the light of my recent and earlier experience. I have been actively associated with industry problems and industry opportunities for many years. The past year has been my most active, particularly overseas. This has been made possible by adequate support from my home.

As president of this association, as a member of the Honey Marketing Authority and as a director of a honey producing and exporting company, I have had good reason to be active—particularly in making the most of available marketing opportunities for all concerned.

With respect for the opinions of others it is my responsibility to state clearly my own opinions on our present position and our prospects for the future. It is not my purpose to reflect popular opinion but rather to help guide the industry to greater political and economic stability, and to help mould opinions and policies which I believe are likely to achieve those ends. Milton wrote "Argument in good men is but opinion in the making."

Firstly it is important that we understand what is involved in terms of existing government service to beekeeping in New Zealand. I hope we can reasonably claim that beekeeping does in turn render a service to the government and to the people of New Zealand. Beekeepers certainly seem to have the goodwill of the people in their respective communities.

In my view the industry is well served by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries in matters relating to the production and grading of our product. It is also well served by the Department of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in matters relating to the marketing of our product.

These are the departments I am continually in touch with both at home and overseas in my marketing work.

The disaster area for both our economics and our politics is that area where the associate minister of agriculture is placed by statute in complete control of our marketing policies. Marketing is not his field.

Marketing

I refer now to the framework of our marketing structure and make the rather obvious suggestion for its improvement. I have not yet discussed the suggestion with any of the government departments concerned.

Our Honey Marketing Authority Regulations are made pursuant to the Primary Products Marketing Act 1953. This Act provides that "In the exercise of its functions and powers, a marketing authority shall comply with the general trade policy of the Government of New Zealand, and shall comply with any general or special directions given by the minister to the marketing authority pursuant to the policy of the government in relation thereto."

According to the interpretation of the Act "Minister" means "Minister of Agriculture". Further the Honey Marketing Authority Regulations provide that the government representative on the authority "shall, in addition to performing his other functions, represent the interests of honey consumers." This provision seems to ignore the fact that the maximum price for honey on the local market is fixed by the Pricing Division of the Department of Trade and Industry. As I understand it, the function of a government representative is essentially to represent the people as a whole without reference to whether they are producers, consumers, taxpayers, exporters, importers or all or none of these.

It is no reflection on present or past government representatives on the board that they have been required to comply with unjustifiable regulations. But the result has been a long-standing blockade of the economic channels of export of honey, even to this day of export emergency. Domination of our marketing or even involvement in our marketing by a production ministry is not sensible.

I am not impressed with arguments of precedents in other producer boards. This association of beekeepers is interested in the sale of its product which is not perishable in the sense that most primary products are. Marketing is therefore a very different exercise from that of other primary products. It has more options for both the producer and the consumer. So long as the government representa-

tive on the Honey Marketing Authority is required to have particular regard for the interest of the consumer, in spite of the fact that those interests are properly provided for in another department of government, then his office can be nothing but that of a cuckoo in the producers' nest. Over the years it has proved to be just that. So long as our marketing body is responsible to a production ministry, our industry will be vulnerable to unnecessary trouble and will lack necessary opportunity. There are resolutions in the authority's minute books which in my view are not a credit to the system.

One such recent resolution will be subjected to close scrutiny elsewhere. It appears to be related to the forthcoming Honey Marketing Authority election. Since voting for the Honey Marketing Authority election will take place very shortly I feel that Conference should consider seeking a delay of one month in the election to enable the true facts to be established.

The associate minister of agriculture is never likely to find a better representative than he now has on the authority and I find fault with the office alone. It is fundamentally unsound for the reasons I have outlined. It cannot work.

Let us look at what does work. In my last report I referred to the need of the comb honey producers to broaden the base of their honey markets. This has been achieved. Without the aid of our Department of Trade and Industry in New Zealand and a number of embassies overseas, little progress could have been made.

During the past year I have, along with others, been involved in selling honey in various countries and in examining the possibilities of improving the industry's marketing.

Success in overseas marketing of both comb honey and retail packs of extracted honey has been achieved with the aid of government departments having the machinery and training which enables them to give the lead and the help we need in export marketing. Beekeepers have been involved in both exhibiting their products and in travelling to the market places. Personally I have made a number of short overseas trips. The most significant new market established in my travels has already proved its worth to the industry.

It would not have been possible for me or anyone else in the industry to get that and some other markets off the ground without the aid of the appropriate government agencies. I wish to

acknowledge their valuable services to our industry. Some of these government officers are living in climatic conditions to which New Zealanders find it very difficult to adjust. They do so in order that they may link New Zealand with important new markets. I doubt if we in New Zealand will ever fully understand what we owe to these people. Our embassies also provide adequate services in the areas of our traditional markets.

Our marketing opportunities are provided for us. Our small industry needs them. We are encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities. Although New Zealand exports only twenty per cent of the honey it produces, I am satisfied production can be increased and that exports can be more than doubled if those producers who wish to be involved in exporting are not obstructed by those not wishing to export and by the abuse of statutory powers wrongly vested in the associate minister of agriculture.

Any producers ability to export should be measured together with the abilities of those who support him — his bankers, his accountants, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Export Guarantee Office, the Inland Revenue Department and his travel agents. Every beekeeper has all these facilities available to him as an individual.

Beekeeping is not just a way of life. It is a way of earning a living and of broadening our horizons. It should be the purpose of this association to keep it that way for all who work in the business of beekeeping.

I feel sure that this can best be achieved through appropriate legislation transferring powers now vested in the associate minister of agriculture to the minister of trade and industry.

I urge this conference give full consideration to this proposal and to make provision for its consideration by branches.

In conclusion — the year has been one of enough challenges to be interesting. It has also been another year in which I have enjoyed working with my executive and with the secretary, Mr Graham Beard and his staff. To them all I express my sincere thanks.

This is my second year as the association's president and as indicated a year ago I will not this year seek reelection. Of my current two year term as a member of our executive, one year is still to be served — I will continue to take a close interest in the affairs of our association and of the industry as a whole.