Varroa T2M Program: How to Bee Resilient

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Following the entrenchment of *Varroa Destructor* in Australia, the National Varroa Mite Management Program (NVMMP) has been working hard to educate both beekeepers and pollination dependent industries on the challenges that lie ahead. Varroa's expected effects are that wild bee populations that many berry growers currently rely on will be devastated and greatly reduced in the coming years. Australia has many things that make it unique as a host of Varroa mite, such as our robust gum tree population and lack of certain disease vectors, so the exact rate of decline is currently unknown. However, it is clear that wild bee pollinations will go down and beekeepers will be in high demand.

As berries are highly dependent on pollination from external sources it is now in every grower's best interest to start their journey into the world of managed pollination. This can take different forms depending on your location but one common factor across the entire country is the relationship that is developed between beekeeper and grower.

"Establishing beekeeper relationships will be the most essential component of successful pollination once Varroa mite becomes established in your growing area"

Essential actions for growers

Some growers may have already formed relationships with beekeepers to assist with your pollination needs. Now is the time to refine the relationship and ensure that all bases are covered, ensuring you have robust pollination agreements/contracts in place.

For growers who are new to working with beekeepers now is the time to start the conversation with your local beekeeper's association. Having early discussions on price, hive location and distribution on your property and expectations from all parties will ensure that everyone gets off on the right foot.

Download and read the Pollination Guide for the Australian Berry Industry 2024 from the industry website Resource Library (berries.net.au/resource-library) to ensure you have all bases covered for when the time comes to transition to the use of managed pollination. This guide will become your go-to for all your base information, and any of the finer details to be successful can be discussed with your beekeeper.

Happy bees

On farm there are a few things that you as the grower, can do to make sure that your bees are as happy as they can be.

Location, location, location:

Speak with your beekeeper to determine the best place on your farm to locate the hives. Communication is the key so that both parties, the beekeeper and the grower, can have a successful pollination season.

Offer a bee-buffet

Have other floral options for the bees to eat. Bees need a varied diet to be healthy. Floral options can also help when flowering is erratic, or weather conditions are less than ideal. Alternate floral options can also be helpful to encourage alternate pollinators to help support your managed hives.

Use chemicals mindfully

Have discussions with your agronomists to make sure that your pesticide choices are the most bee-friendly that they can possibly be. This conversation will be important as it may lead to changes in chemical application and timing to ensure that there is no harm to the hives on your or your neighbours' properties who may still be in the process of completing their pollination season.

Embrace technology

You can share information about hive locations and crop protection activities easily with neighbours using the free **BeeConnected app**. Farmers and beekeepers can seamlessly communicate and collaborate, ensuring the safety of bees and encouraging sustainable farming practices.

Find out more at beeconnected.org.au

Resources for berry growers

Search the berry industry website RESOURCE LIBRARY at berries.net.au/resource-library by selecting the 'Pollination' Category or typing a search term into the Search box

There are over 50 articles, factsheets and guides currently available

- NVMMP: On Farm Reference Guide for Honeybee Management
- Pollination Guide for Australian Berry Industry 2024
- Varroa — What Does it Mean for Pollination in Australia
- Visit Wheen Bee Foundations Bee Friendly Farming at: www.beefriendlyfarming.org.au
- Strawberries — Pollination
- Blueberries — Pollination
- Berries — Pollination
- A guide to Australian crop pollinating insects
- Powerful Pollinators Planting Guides

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