

Waikato FARMING LIFESTYLES

March 2012 Edition

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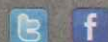
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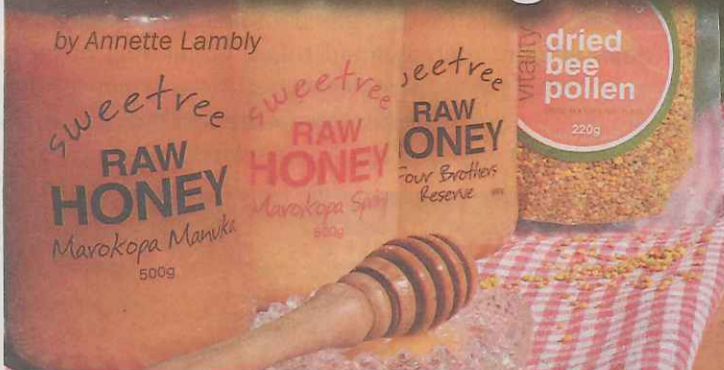
Find us online or phone 07 853 2640

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HONEY

a sweet tasting success for family

by Annette Lambly



Martin Lynch had been a hobbyist beekeeper for many years before he and his wife Stephanie realised bees could actually help diversify their income



Martin and Stephanie Lynch enjoy the personal contact they have with the business

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All photos by Claudia Aalderink

The couple purchased a 4.2 hectare block at Horsham Downs near Hamilton in 2002. Martin an electrical engineer had inherited a few beehives from his father and the couple set about building up their number of hives.

Initially it was just an interest. Stephanie who works part time for a software company has always been interested in natural healthy food, while Martin, after working at a desk all week, enjoyed managing the bees and the physical nature of the work.

Nowadays the hobby has grown into a boutique style business — Sweettree Honey — which has been commercially retailing since 2008. It sells not only honey but bee pollen and

beeswax. The family-owned business manages around 100 hives on the home farm and at two other Waikato sites.

One of the things Martin learned as a hobbyist beekeeper was he could obtain sensational honey from only a small number of hives — the secret was the nearby floral sources and how you processed the honey.

The couple wanted to make their honey unique to Waikato and for this reason Sweettree has chosen its hive sites carefully. The Marokopa Valley was the first site chosen. It's in coastal hill country with extensive native bush.

Three varieties of distinctive honey are harvested from this area which they sell as Marokopa Spring, Marokopa Summer and Marokopa Manuka.

In the first season the heketara tree flowered profusely and the honey from this site had a distinctive toffee-tasting honey, while the following season was rewarewa, followed by kamahi/rewarewa — all marketed as Marokopa Spring.

Outstanding in the field

NORTHERN MIX:

Riley, Canterbury perennial ryegrass, striker annual ryegrass, huia white clover, red clover, chicory and plantain.

29kg – Cost including gst and freight \$168 per ha

SOUTHERN MIX:

Enticer long term ryegrass, cutter tetraploid Italian huia white clover, red clover, timothy ryegrass, plantain.

30kg – Cost including gst and freight \$162 per ha

NATIONWIDE ANNUAL MIX:

Cutter, striker, white clover, red clover.

29kg – Cost including gst and freight \$150 per ha

Mixes above are only a suggestion and can be altered to suit your farming requirements. All prices include gst and freight over 100kg, our place to yours.

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Mid season (December to January) the manuka flowers and these frames of honey are separated out and the remaining honey (hill country flowers and rata) is sold as Marokopa Summer.

The hives closer to home produce a pasture blend of clover, thistle and buttercup. While the honey harvested on the Four Brothers Farm, between Hamilton and Raglan, close to surrounding native bush and high country pastures is predominantly clover and kanuka.

Sweettree never mixes the honey from one site with another, leaving it to the bees to do their own mixing.

"Bees are amazing creatures and produce wonderful natural food," says Stephanie.

"Each apiary location has its own special nuance and character and this is reflected in the honey. We don't heat our products any higher than would occur naturally in the beehive. This means the natural enzymes present in the honey are preserved and you end up with a product that is not only great tasting but as nature intended."

The enterprise produces about four tonnes of honey per year.

"Our operation is small enough that we can take care of every aspect and ensure that the very best quality is delivered."

"We enjoy working together on the business and our boys, Daniel (nine years) and Matthew (seven years) are talking about how they can be involved too, so that is great."

Sweettree is currently offering bags of premixed flower seeds of 'proven bee favourites'. The proceeds of all sales goes to the National Beekeepers Association to help save the New Zealand bees.

Worldwide honey bee numbers are in decline as their natural habitats are destroyed by agricultural mechanisation and chemical practises. There is a call for farmers and landowners to restore pollinator-friendly habitats, including key flowering plants near crop-producing fields and to take more care with the choice, timing and application of insecticides and other chemicals. The demise of the honey bee would threaten the pollination of 80-90 percent of the world's food supplies.

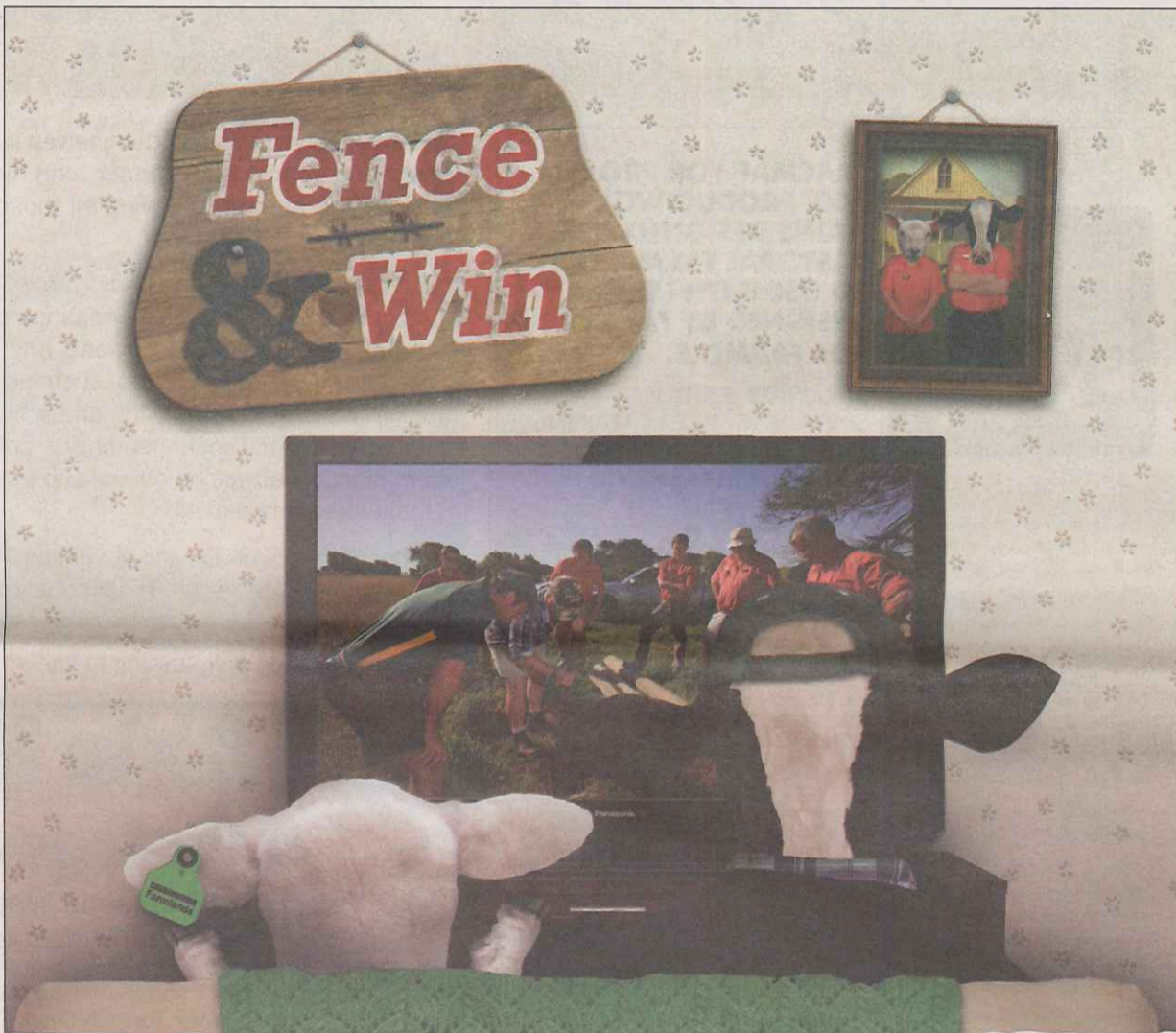
Sweettree products can be bought on-line at www.sweettreehoney.co.nz, through selected stores nationwide or at the Hamilton's Farmers Market.

"We love the markets. We enjoy people's reactions when they taste our honey, and love to see them coming back for more. Many have become good friends," said Stephanie.



Martin collecting honey from one of the hive sites

"Bees are amazing creatures and produce wonderful natural food"



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