



MEDIA RELEASE



Tuesday 18 April 2017

New plant breeding program to grow Australian Manuka Honey market

The production of High Grade Manuka Honey in Australia has been given a boost, with the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) contracting a *Leptospermum* breeding program with West Australian based company ManukaLife.

ManukaLife and RIRDC, in collaboration with Kings Park Botanical Gardens, have entered into a three-year research agreement to conduct a plant breeding program for the development of High Grade Manuka Honey.

RIRDC Managing Director, John Harvey welcomed the new breeding program which supports RIRDC's new and emerging industries portfolio.

“The breeding program builds on a current project funded by the RIRDC Honey Bee and Pollination Program which identified Australian *Leptospermum* species with high levels of bioactivity,” said Mr Harvey.

“Our aim is to grow the availability of *Leptospermum* plantations for honey production and provide an alternative enterprise for Australian farmers, which in turn will address the growing global demand for Manuka Honey.”

Manuka Honey is the commercially recognised name for honey derived from *Leptospermum*, a fire and water adapted Tea Tree species endemic to temperate coastal areas of Australia and New Zealand.

The emerging Manuka Honey industry has made headlines for its medical applications in speeding wound recovery and managing bacterial infections, a product deemed even more important with increasing antibiotic resistance across the globe.

RIRDC's partner ManukaLife is focused on building a sustainable commercial Manuka Honey industry, inclusive of propagation, plantations, growers, apiarists, through to production and product distribution.

The breeding program will develop elite crosses of *Leptospermum* with important commercial and agronomic traits in addition to high bioactivity levels, explained ManukaLife Managing Director, Paul Callander.

“Scientists at Kings Park have had success in developing attributes in other Australian native species that we want to deliver as part of our plant breeding program,” said Mr Callander.

“Some of these include longer flowering periods, higher nectar volumes, greater heat tolerance, higher methylglyoxal (MGO) content for the medical market applications.”





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Mr Callander added, “Australia needs to continue to develop a diversified portfolio of premium agricultural industries that command a high value and allow for the potential value add and flow on benefits in research and product development. Manuka honey is one of these industries.

“We expect the breeding program will have strong commercial value and contribute to efficient production of High Grade Manuka Honey that has scientifically proven effectiveness in wound healing and bacterial control.”

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Picture from L – R: Mark Web, DAFWA acting Director General; Dave Alden, RIRDC General Manager, Research and Innovation; Digby Gowns, Kings Park Botanical Gardens; Senior Plant Breeder, Tony Woods, Manuka Life Operations Manager; Duncan Farquhar, RIRDC Program Manager; Paul Callander, ManukaLife Managing Director and Paul Kordic, ManukaLife Director.

