

# Sweeter outlook for WA's Manuka products

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**ManukaLife chairman Paul Callander with some of the company's food and medical products.**

WA's fledgling Manuka honey industry has reached the milestone of manufacturing its own value-added products for food and medicinal purposes.

ManukaLife chairman Paul Callander said the group had partnered with a local manufacturer to make products which included a baby and skincare range, topical antibacterial dressings and pure Manuka honey retailing for \$300 to \$500 per 500g jar in Asia.

High-grade Manuka honey wholesales for up to \$120kg depending on the levels of methylglyoxal (MGO), converted from an enzyme in Manuka nectar, but Mr Callander said there would not be bulk wholesale exports from WA. "We won't ship bulk honey. We want to manufac-

ture products and value add in WA," he said.

"There is a big opportunity for high-margin, downstream value-add product development in the medical, pharmaceutical, cosmetic and nutraceutical markets."

He said the first products would be used to test the market and gauge feedback from international customers. In the meantime, the industry is working to produce enough high-grade Manuka honey to ensure it meets global demand.

ManukaLife aims to have 3000ha under plantings within the next decade, most contracted on WA farmers' land, after reaching 1000ha this year.

A *Leptospermum* plantbreeding program is under way with Kings

Park and Botanical Gardens, aiming to hybridise the plant so it can be grown in hot and cold climates and its flowering period is extended from six weeks to six months. It is supported by a three-year \$750,000 grant from Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation.

ManukaLife is also developing another potentially lucrative product in Manuka Oil, an antibacterial, antifungal and antioxidant which wholesales for about \$400 a kilogram, 10 times that of tea-tree oil.

High levels of the antibacterial Beta Triketone have been confirmed to derive from the leaves of one of the types of *Leptospermum* varieties suitable for growing in WA.

"After testing some of plantations for Manuka Oil we have found we have the Beta Triketones in sufficient yield to push this forward into commercial development," Mr Callander said.

A new distillation plant would need to be built in WA and a new product range developed from the harvested oils.

But the best type of *Leptospermum* plants for oil is different to the best honeyproducing plants, so a separate plant-breeding program is about to start, aimed at increasing the biomass and yield of oil that can be produced.

In parallel, work is being done to determine the best way to harvest the leaves with various machinery, and trials have started on about 100ha of existing plantings.