



Submission by

WAFarmers (Beekeeping Section)
on

Agricultural Competitiveness Issues paper

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Submitted to:

Agricultural Competitiveness Taskforce
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WAFARMERS FEDERATION BACKGROUND

The Western Australian Farmers Federation (Inc.) (WAFarmers) is the State's largest and most influential rural lobby and service organisation. WAFarmers represents approximately 4,000 Western Australian farmers from primary industries including grain growers, meat and wool producers, horticulturalists, dairy farmers, commercial egg producers and beekeepers. Collectively our members are major contributors to the \$5.5 billion gross value of production that agriculture in its various forms contributes annually to Western Australia's economy. Additionally, through differing forms of land tenure, our members own, control and capably manage many millions of hectares of the State's land mass and as such are responsible for maintaining the productive capacity and environmental wellbeing of that land.

WAFarmers Beekeepers Section welcomes the opportunity to comment on *the "Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper"* .

Note: WAFarmers will be posting a separate submission to address issues within mainstream agricultural industries.

INTRODUCTION

WAFarmers strongly endorses the National Farmers Federation *“Blueprint for Australian Agriculture 2013 - 2020”* which is designed to inform the future direction of agriculture in Australia. The Blueprint is subject to regular review and amendment to reflect the prevailing circumstances. Of the Blueprint priorities, industry leaders selected four key goals they wish to see actioned today to ensure the success of the Australian agricultural sector tomorrow:

- **Innovation, research, development, extension:** Securing investment in, and developing a model to underpin, research, development and extension in Australian agriculture.
- **Competitiveness:** Building the sector’s competitiveness and profitability through understanding our market opportunities and value chains to create growth, market access and future opportunities.
- **Agriculture within society:** Telling the story of agriculture by building a common narrative about the sector, in order to better position agriculture in the minds of urban Australians, prospective employees and international markets.
- **Natural resources:** Embedding sustainability as core business across agriculture and its supply chain.

1. Ensuring food security in Australia and globally

What opportunities exist to expand agricultural production in Australia and how can we take advantage of them?

Industry	Problem	Solution
	<p>Problem: Government failing to act on inquiry findings There have been a number of inquiries into the bee industry, including <i>“More than Honey – the future of the Australian honey bee and pollination industries”</i>, <i>“Pollination Aware: the Real value of Pollination in Australia”</i> and now a <i>“Senate Inquiry into the Future of Beekeeping and Pollination Industries in Australia”</i> currently under way. Although solutions were identified the Government didn’t act on them.</p>	<p>Solutions: For the Federal and State Governments, in consultation with industry, to act on the recommendations made in the current <i>“Senate Inquiry into the Future of Beekeeping and Pollination Industries in Australia”</i> and honour the commitment made to undertake recommendations from the <i>“More than Honey – the future of the Australian honey bee and pollination industries”</i> document.</p>
	<p>Problem: Lack of market access Australian beekeepers are not provided with opportunities or access to countries for export opportunities for packaged bees, honey and pollen.</p>	<p>Solution: Include honey and the export of bees in free trade agreements. Make exporting of honey, pollen, bees easier out of Australia.</p>

What alternative actions or measures by governments, farmers or others would result in improved financial performance at the farm gate?

<p>Problem: The Federal Government continues to walk away from border and industry biosecurity putting pressure on industry to levy itself if it wishes to remain free of pests and diseases. A perfect example is the <i>Asian Honeybee</i> incursion in Australia whereby industry supported eradication due to the effect it would have on the industry. The resulting cost-sharing arrangement with the Federal Government has seen eradication downscaled to control. The Australian Honey Bee Industry Council is now calling on beekeepers to increase their honey levy to cater for some of the biosecurity measures that the Federal and State Government should be funding as a commitment to supporting the industry that supports the horticulture and agriculture industries. The next threat is the <i>Varroa mite (exotic to Australia)</i>. The Bee industry is too small to be able to levy itself to deal with such incidences should it decide to eradicate.</p>	<p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased funding by the Government for biosecurity against pest and disease incursions. • The cost-sharing agreement between industry and government should be reviewed to enable Government to assist industry financially more than it has to date in such situations. • The Federal Government should assist industry in eradicating Asian Honeybee without industry having to pay back funding is in the national interest.
<p>Problem: Local producers are disadvantaged by imports of honey with lower Quality Assurance Levels. Australian farmers produce very high quality food. They are being disadvantaged in their own domestic market by imports of products which do not need to meet the same stringent protocols with regards to matters such as chemical residues and quality assurance. Many countries exporting honey into Australia have chemical residue and contamination levels not accepted by Australian QA programs.</p>	<p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce which enters Australia and competes in the same market place must have at least the same quality assurance standard requirements. • Policies should be in place to ensure all imported honey and related products have the same or higher Quality Assurance levels of beekeepers in Australia. This will ensure equality in the market place and that products are safe for human consumption.
<p>Problem: Production of honey in WA is limited to the number of sites available. A strong pollination industry (for the horticulture and agriculture industries) relies on having a strong honey industry with access to viable sites for build-up (of bees) and honey production. Production of honey in WA is limited to the number of sites</p>	<p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Victorian Government's 2013 <i>"Apiculture (Beekeeping) on public land policy"</i> which encourages apiculture on public land should be adopted by all states. • Governments must ensure access and tenure to apiary sites on public land as well as security of those sites. • The Beekeeping industry must be considered in regional and forest

<p>available in the state; there is a high risk of more honey being imported into the country causing potential pest and disease incidences. The</p>	<p>management plans; operational plans; and forest zoning plans (if applicable) in each State. Without access to the resource, the bee industry will not exist into the future.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation and consideration given to the bee industry for new and existing Forest Management Plans are being drafted.
<p>Problem: Lack of government investment in biosecurity Currently, in Western Australia beekeepers already levy themselves a fee-for-service to provide funding to the Department of Agriculture and Food WA for an enhanced pest and disease surveillance program. Industry should not have to be forced into a position where it does that. Biosecurity is the one basic area that Government should take responsibility for at border level while industry tackles their own hives.</p>	<p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The States need to spend more money on biosecurity in the bee industry.

How might existing laws and regulations be changed to address any market power imbalances in the agricultural supply chain, without limiting prospects for global-scale firms developing in Australia?

Existing laws have allowed the big two supermarkets to dominate. Farmers regularly relate issues of misuse of market power and believe any reporting of this will result in little action by the authorities and the certain loss of their contracts if they speak out. Regulators seem to impose more scrutiny on some co-operatives that are really beneficial to agriculture and yet do little to control the abuse of market power by others.

Problem	Solution
<p>Most Jarrah honey sold has an activity reading on the label stating how strong the antimicrobial activity of the honey is. This is also an indication of how pure the honey is vs blended cheaper honey with Jarrah honey to taste. There are countries which export their honey into Australia with very low levels of 'activity' due to it being blended. This provides a substandard product and diminishes the opportunity for Australia to compete due to blending.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The activity reading on Jarrah honey needs to be standardized and enforced. • WAFarmers supports "truth in labelling" and "country of origin" labelling. Current labelling regulations allow for the system to be abused providing opportunity to blend various honeys and cheating consumer into thinking that it is a pure product as per the label. This downgrades the product, consumer confidence and undermines the industry.

What skills including specialised skills and training, will be required in the future and how can these be delivered and uptake encouraged?

- Basic management of keeping hives; identifying bee pest and diseases as well as knowing how to deal with these – to ensure there is adequate biosecurity in the bee industry. The Basic Beekeeping Skill (Nationally endorsed) set should be mandatory with registering a hive in Western Australia. <http://www.agrifoodskills.net.au/?BeekeepingSkillSet>

How can rural industries and governments better identify, prioritise and fund research, development and extension?

Problem	Solution
<p>Currently the system within Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) works quite well as far as identifying priorities for the industry. Areas of priority are prioritised by the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC) which each state beekeeper group is a member of. On a periodical basis, WAFarmers Beekeepers Executive is asked to priorities R&D activities which are then fed through the National peak body (AHBIC) and later RIRDC.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retain existing system.

Enhancing agricultural exports

How can industries and government respond to the key challenges and opportunities to increase or enhance exports?

- Promote good relationships with our trading partners. Facilitate export industries through streamlining approval processes, ensuring port infrastructure and access to ports is efficient and cost effective.
- Australia should focus on producing high quality food to the world. There are opportunities for Australian agriculture to be the preferred country of produce.

In the bee industry, there is opportunity to export Jarrah Honey. Beekeepers also have the potential to produce highly valued Manuka honey. The opportunity for niche marketing exists.