



While bees can be left to do what comes naturally their hive management can't be left to nature.
Victoria Rutherford reports on how to keep bees busy.

Adherence to specific guidelines is critical when it comes to quality bee management, apicultural adviser Tony Roper, of AsureQuality, says.

At a Foundation for Arable Research Combinable Crops field day in Chertsey, near Rakaia in Canterbury, Roper spoke about determining hive quality, bee quality and good pollination.

He said a strong bee population was essential, with 1.5-2 boxes of bees a hive the optimum amount.

Too-strong hives can swarm while

underpopulated hives are susceptible to raiding.

Hives must be expanding and need a vigorous young queen laying 1500 eggs a day.

"Her laying so many eggs creates brood and stimulates the bees to go out and collect ... and that is what you want –

bees working your crop."

Empty combs are needed to store pollen on for feeding new eggs. Evidence of pollen in a hive indicates bees are working.

Hives must be disease treated and feed stores such as raw sugar or sugar syrup

within the hive will compensate for marginal weather.

Roper said the best way to ensure the hive was strong was to get a look inside when the beekeeper was tending it. Watching activity in and out of the hives is not a good indicator as strong hives will rob weak ones.

"Put on a suit or go in your vehicle and watch with your windows up so you can see how many bees you have got," he said.

If unsure, hive audits are available, which Roper said would "keep the beekeeper honest".



“The important thing is come to an agreement with the beekeeper, not on the day the hives are coming in but a few weeks beforehand.”

This can include strength of the hive, frames of bees, frames of brood, disease management and minimum food supplies.

“The type of crop dictates hive numbers and it is important to consider the best placement with your beekeeper,” Roper said.

“You want the bees in the middle of the crop because bees fly in a circle from the hive – you want them flying a minimum distance.”

Roper suggested a staggered payment system, such as 10 per cent the month before delivery, 40 per cent on delivery of

the hives and 50 per cent on removal.

Discuss with the keeper subjectivity to audit, and immediate replacement of the hives in the case of audit failure.

Bees like sunny, sheltered spots and in the hive the brood nest needs to be 34(C).

Growers can manage crops to maximise pollen and nectar yield. For example, a white clover crop needs soil temperatures of over 20(C to produce pollen and

nectar, so avoiding bore water irrigation during pollination times is sensible.

“(Cold groundwater) and high pressure will kill a lot of bees, and you are paying for those bees.”

Planning irrigation in the evening or early morning when bees are not actively working the crop is a good idea, as is avoiding agrichemicals and surfactants.

“Talk to your neighbours, let them know you have hives – you don’t want them spraying and killing all your bees,” Roper said.

A varied diet is important in maintaining a vigorous hive. Roper suggested leaving a few weeds such as dandelions around so the bees would not have to forage so far to get different proteins.

Finally, he urged sustainability. Planting natives on the farm could be great for the build-up period before the bees began working the crop, as many of the high-protein sources such as gorse hedges were now gone.

“You might be feeding them a little bit earlier but you will have healthy bees by the time your crop is ready.”

Evidence of pollen in a hive indicates bees are working.



“The important thing is come to an agreement with the beekeeper, not on the day the hives are coming in but a few weeks beforehand.”