

West Coast Honey at Gingin



John and Kerry Fewster and sons, Stephen and Paul, commissioned a 'state-of-the-art' honey house and extraction unit at Gingin on 23 September 2003.

The honey house

There is an information and sales area at the front of the honey house. Visitors can view the entire extracting operation through a series of plate glass windows.

This is a break-through in communication between the commercial part of the industry and the people who are interested in things 'rural', even experienced beekeepers would not fail to be impressed.

In the extraction process, the frames of honey are removed from the boxes and placed on a conveyor that takes them through a stainless steel uncapping machine, and automatically queues them to go into a 128-frame extractor. The extracted honey is mixed with the capping, put through the centrifuge and the honey is pumped into one of three large tanks.

A range of varietal honeys is for sale under the 'West Coast Honey' brand. They sell 'White gum', 'Jarrah', 'Redgum', 'Wildflower' (mainly parrot bush), 'Mallee' (from Ravensthorpe) and some creamed honey. Taste testing the different honeys is encouraged. They also sell propolis and many apitherapy products.

Peter Cash at Bee Engineering in Willetton designed and made all the machinery.

Kerry Fewster



Eighty-four years of continuous beekeeping around Gingin

This family can boast eighty-four years of continuous beekeeping in the same area.

Patriarch Nelson Fewster started catching swarms and keeping bees in 1920 at age thirteen. He learned the 'trade' from his Uncle Robert who kept bees at Harvey. Nelson kept a diary recording honey flows and rainfall amongst other things from 1936 to 1999.

Nelson and his three sons, John, Colin and David worked together farming cattle, sheep, growing citrus and beekeeping until the late 1980's under the business name of 'NH Fewster & Sons'.



John and his son, Stephen registered the brand 'Kuyan Apiaries' in 1994. The business is mixed farming and beekeeping. They operate 1800 hives. Both sons did apprenticeships; Stephen qualified as a butcher and Paul as a carpenter and joiner.

The resource

Beekeepers in Western Australia have access to one of the greatest resources for beekeeping in the world and the family have privately owned land and CALM sites from Yanchep to Jurien Bay along the coast. They also collect 'Jarrah' 'Redgum' and 'Blackbutt' honey from Dwellingup, 'Karri' honey from Pemberton, and 'Mallee' from Ravensthorpe and Coolgardie.

In the past, they travelled to Payne's Find for 'York Gum' and still use sites at New Norcia, Bindoon and Mogumber for both 'Redgum' and 'White Gum'.

Unfortunately, the 'Redgum' flows in the last two years have been poor. "A good flow relies on two to three good wet winters for good nectar production", said Stephen. Western Australia has experienced several years of drier than average rainfall. "Nelson's diaries showed that the Gingin area would record an annual rainfall of about 40 inches every ten years but that has not happened for forty years", said Kerry.

Biosecurity

Stephen is currently National President of the Federal Council of Australia Apiarist Association (FCAAA), on the Board of the Australian Honey Bee Industry Council (AHBIC) and President of W. A. Farmers Beekeepers section.

"Biosecurity and maintaining access to CALM managed land is a priority", said Stephen. Stephen's biosecurity concerns are EFB, small hive beetle and Varroa mite. "If you have small hive beetle, you have to extract honey the day you bring the frames in. It is important that the industry remains free of the Varroa mite. If we get Varroa, we will have to treat with chemical strips and at present the WA industry is chemical free", said Stephen.

"Chalkbrood has probably cost us at least ten per cent of our production and we have had to manage the hives differently. We found the odd one or two (dead mummies) three months after it was first found in WA and it took about twelve months to have an affect on our production", said Stephen.

Kerry added, "We have a unique world class resource and we are free of chemicals and we want to keep it that way".

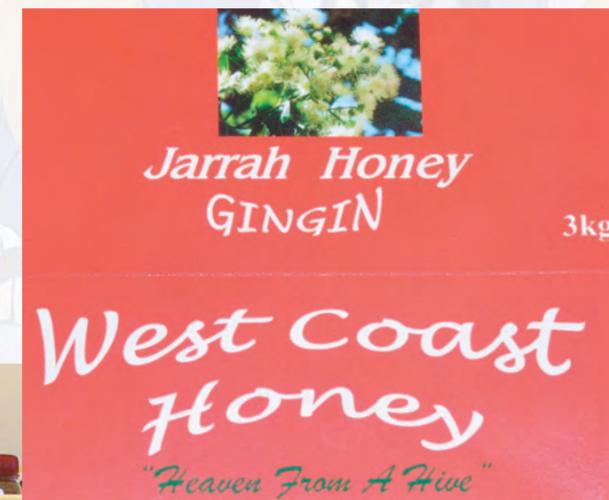
Hobbies

The family are all sports minded. "We all love sport. Stephen plays and coaches football, plays tennis, bowls, water skiis and goes fishing", said Kerry.

Kerry has played netball, tennis, and now plays golf and bowls and coaches junior golf.



Stephen Fewster



Paul Fewster

