

MEDIA RELEASE
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New Zealand experts to help combat Varroa mite threat

The nation's horticulture research and development corporation has combined forces with Plant & Food Research New Zealand to strengthen Australia's defences against *Varroa* mite and enhance crop pollination through a \$5 million targeted research project.

Horticulture Innovation Australia Chief Executive John Lloyd said: "Australia is the last known inhabited continent in the world that is not permeated by *Varroa* mite, and as recent Queensland *Varroa Jacobsini* mite discoveries have shown, the threat is very real.

"If the more damaging *Varroa Destructor* mite took hold in Australia, it would affect colonies of bees, having a significant negative impact on hive availability for pollination, and potentially devastate the livelihoods of certain growers whose produce relies solely on bee pollination.

"It's vital that we safeguard the nation's supply of honey bee pollination dependant fruit, nuts and vegetables, and arm the beekeeping industry with the tools it needs to respond to a *Varroa* outbreak."

Plant & Food Research New Zealand is well-placed to provide expert advice and leadership on preparing for and adapting to *Varroa* control. The pest has been in the country for more than a decade and presented a serious threat to managed honey bee colonies, honey production and crop pollination.

"New Zealand crop industries rely heavily on the services of pollinators, including honey-bees. When *Varroa* became established in the country, it necessitated a rapid, no-nonsense, scientifically-robust response," Plant & Food Research Science Team Leader Dr David Pattemore said.

"While a *Varroa* incursion is a scenario that no one wants to see, moving to improve pollination practices now will not only prepare the Australian industry for the possible future arrival of the mite, but also lead to significant benefits in crop yields in the short term.

"Our experience in dealing with *Varroa* and optimising crop pollination, which includes work with the macadamia and avocado industry in Australia, means that we are well placed to work with Australian growers to determine how to improve pollination and to prepare for the changes that would be needed if *Varroa* arrive,"

The five-year research project will also determine current pollination requirements for specific fruit, vegetable and nut species, which have not previously been established, and provide honey bee stocking rate recommendations with partners Plant Health Australia.

Currently, Horticulture Innovation Australia is investing more than \$13 million in pollination-related projects, largely funded using industry levies and funds from the Australian Government.

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