Our pollinating hero the honeybee

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Looking back on the first half of 2010, it’s clear the period has been one of both significant change and achievement for RIRDC.

RIRDC welcomed a new Chair, Professor Daniela Stehlik from Charles Darwin University. Daniela is one of Australia’s leading social scientists in the areas of sustainability, human service practice and social cohesion with a focus on families and communities in regional and rural Australia. I look forward to working with Daniela and the Board to address the many challenges and opportunities that will confront RIRDC in the months ahead, including the Productivity Commission’s review of the Rural Research and Development Corporations.

The other major organisational change was the departure of Dr Peter O’Brien who had been Managing Director of RIRDC for some five years. During this time Peter was at the forefront of a number of significant changes within RIRDC that improved the way we carry out research and development into Australia’s rural industries.

I have been appointed RIRDC’s next Managing Director following a career in the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry where I worked primarily in the area of international agricultural trade.

This winter edition of RIRDC’s magazine brings to life the extraordinary diversity of RIRDC, and reaffirms why I decided to join the organisation.

RIRDC has a unique mandate to invest in a diverse range of rural industries and cross sectoral issues, from bioenergy, rice and farming families, to olives, chicken meat and trade policy. It’s this diversity which makes RIRDC such an interesting and fulfilling place to work. Another rewarding aspect of working here is engaging with a wide range of stakeholders who are involved in a variety of rural industries.

A few months ago we asked many of these, and other stakeholders from government and the research community to provide us feedback on how RIRDC is performing, what they’d like more of, and where we could do better. The survey confirmed that most of our stakeholders believe RIRDC is doing a good job, and that they enjoy a positive working relationship with the RIRDC team. It’s a positive sign that more than eight out of ten respondents believed that RIRDC’s performance over the past 12 months had been either good or excellent. But like all surveys the exercise threw up some areas for improvement, which is where we will be focussing on in the coming months.

An interesting fact the survey highlighted was the value our stakeholders place in the way we involve industry in decisions regarding priorities for the research and development program.

A good example of this is in the area of pollination, where we work closely with the RIRDC Pollination R&D Advisory Committee to identify those areas of R&D that are needed to secure the future of pollination in Australia. From this sub-program comes one of RIRDC’s most significant research publications of the year—Pollination Aware: The Real Value of Pollination in Australia. The report, which is discussed on pages 12 and 13 of this magazine, provides a value on pollination services for 35 different commodity groups by analysing the effect of honeybees on production in these industries. This collection of data is a first for R&D reporting in Australia as it is one of the most comprehensive studies ever into the critical role that pollination services play to underpin Australia’s horticulture and agriculture industries.

In this edition of Rural Diversity we also meet the winner and runner-up of the 2010 RIRDC Rural Women’s Award, Sue Middleton and Alana Johnson; preview an upcoming report on trade negotiations; and go on the road with the RIRDC-sponsored participant of the Australian Rural Leadership Program, Catherine Marriott. We also look at a study into a possible link between tea tree oil and the treatment of skin cancers and profile a major report released at the national ABARE conference on the wide range of new rural industries which are suited to climate change.

One of the champions of Australia’s new rural industries, in particular the native food industry was Sibylla Hess-Buschmann who passed away earlier this year. Sibylla led research and development into native foods for a number of years with one of her greatest achievements opening up international market access for Australia’s native food producers. Sibylla will be missed profoundly by her industry, and on behalf of RIRDC, I offer her family, her friends and her colleagues in the industry our condolences.

The following articles provide a snapshot of some of RIRDC’s investment in research, development and extension. I hope you find them interesting and look forward to any feedback you would like to provide us.

Craig Burns
An upcoming RIRDC report due to be released later this year is set to provide both Australian and international policy makers with an alternative framework for agricultural trade negotiations that could potentially help facilitate multilateral trade negotiations.

*Viability of a Critical Mass Framework for Agricultural Trade Negotiations*, (RIRDC Pub. No. 10/025), argues that agricultural negotiations in the future could be negotiated on the basis of a ‘critical mass’ framework as opposed to the ‘single undertaking’ approach which applies to the current round of negotiations.

It has been claimed that the single undertaking framework, which is effected through consensus decision making involving all World Trade Organisation members participating in all of the negotiations, is one of the reasons progress is slowing in the current agricultural trade negotiations.

Under the critical mass approach, only those WTO members accounting for a nominated major percentage of trade would take on new obligations. The framework has been used in other WTO negotiations, ranging from the basic Telecommunications and Financial Services Agreements to the Information Technologies Agreement, and is seen as a quicker and more effective way of progressing multilateral trade talks.

The report’s authors, Andrew Stoller from the Institute of International Trade, University of Adelaide, and Peter Gallagher, argue that the critical mass approach should be considered by policy makers for future trade negotiation frameworks following the Doha Round.

As part of their study, the researchers undertook two large-scale global opinion surveys designed to test attitudes toward critical mass agreements. They also sought the opinions of a large number of independent experts from around the world on the feasibility of critical mass negotiations on trade in agriculture.

The Doha Development Round is the current trade negotiation round of the WTO. It commenced in November 2001, with the objective to lower trade barriers around the world which allows countries to increase trade globally.

*Viability of a Critical Mass Framework for Agricultural Trade Negotiations*, due to be released later this year, is part of RIRDC’s Global Challenges Program. The Program is a new RIRDC initiative which collectively addresses impediments and opportunities to Australian agriculture that have arisen as a result of global forces.

Further information, Simon Winter, Research Manager, T: 0419 720 700; E: simon@swinter.com.au
Roving workers to the
Helping rural Australia get the

Attracting and retaining skilled workers is a common problem for many employers and communities in Australia.

It’s a challenge felt most keenly in rural communities, where they also often face with ageing populations, and an ongoing struggle to hang on to their young people.

The irony is that many of these rural towns often enjoy a steady flow of skilled workers passing through their communities – the problem, however, is getting these roving workers to establish their roots there, and enticing them to stay for the long term.

RIRDC has released Australia’s first ever study into how rural communities can encourage these mobile professionals, such as doctors, locums, teachers, ‘tree changers’ and ‘sea changers’ to live and work in rural communities longer.

The Mobile Skilled Workforce (RIRDC Pub. No. 10/077) undertaken by Deakin University led by Professor Sue Kilpatrick, also looks at how rural communities can get the most out of these skilled professionals during their stay.

The report found that communities which were innovative, embraced diversity, accepted newcomers and acknowledged the skills of new arrivals were more likely to attract and retain skilled workers.

The study also found there is much local governments, employers and community groups can also do to assist mobile skilled workers to integrate into new communities and to encourage them to extend their stays.

For example, communities which are proactive in welcoming skilled workers and their families, and which help them to integrate and feel a sense of belonging, are most likely to benefit during their stay.

The researchers also argue that it’s important to achieve the ‘right fit’ before a mobile skilled worker starts work in a rural area. To do this, employers and HR managers are encouraged to assess the capacity and willingness of mobile skilled workers and their families to become involved in community life outside the workplace.

The Deakin University research team will present their findings at the upcoming SEGRA (Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia) conference, which is being held this year in Townsville from 19-21 October.

Further information: Ken Moore, Acting General Manager, National Rural Issues on T: 02 6271 4127; E: ken.moore@rirdc.gov.au.
rescue in rural Australia most out of a skilled workforce

Martin in Mackay
Ten years ago, Martin Homisan made a lifestyle decision that a growing number of Australians are making...

The European born professional traded in his city lifestyle and became a “mobile skilled worker” – people who enjoy hitting the road and using their skills in variety of locations around the country, often in rural and regional Australia.

After working in a number of communities in Western Australia and Queensland, Martin now works as the regional investment attraction manager at the Mackay-Whitsunday-Isaac Regional Economic Development Corporation.

Martin recently helped stage the inaugural Invest Mackay-Whitsunday-Isaac Conference 2010 which looked at how the growing regional area could take advantage of future opportunities.

Martin is passionate about his job and his new town, but he’s the first to admit that he’s had to adapt and get used to working in smaller regional communities.

“It’s been great to use my skills in different locations around the country, but it has been a bit of learning curve,” Martin says.

“The dynamics of metro versus country are complex, and it’s easy for a newcomer, such as me, to misunderstand why things are the way they are in the country.

“I’ve experienced both the highs and lows in terms of engaging and integrating into new communities, and I’ve learnt the importance of being open and flexible when it comes to settling in to a new environment.”

In Martin’s view, getting the most out of rural workers is very much a two way street. Communities also need to be open, accessible and prepared to accept change.

“It’s critical that regional communities are open to mobile workers, and are prepared accept their ideas and contributions,” Martin says.

“This will be particularly important in the years to come as regional Australian confronts increasingly complex and unpredictable challenges.”

The Mobile Skilled Workforce (RIRDC Pub. No. 10/077) contains a number of case studies like Martin’s. The report is available on the RIRDC website <https://rirdc.infoservices.com.au/items/10-077>
Our unique talent pool

By the age of 16, nanotechnology students have a chance to work in a future
industry. This provides a great opportunity to demonstrate your
talent and skills.

How are you going to make a difference in the workplace when you leave uni?
How are you going to make sure that you stand out from the crowd?

The Investing in Youth program is designed to help you do just that. This new
joint government / industry partnership is assisting Australian students who are
committed to a career in primary industries. We’re helping young Australians
achieve their career goals by providing them with financial assistance, as well as
work placements and a professional mentor.

RIRDC will invite applications for the 2011 program later this year. We encourage
you to apply, and make sure you stand out from the crowd!

Go to the RIRDC website <www.rirdc.gov.au> to find more information on the
class of 2010.

Heywire

Heywire provides a space for the conversation, stories, debate and ideas
of young people from rural and regional Australia.

Since Heywire began in 1988 over 400 stories have been broadcast on the ABC.

Entries for Heywire 2010 have opened, and young Australians have until 8
October 2010 to get them in.

More information on Heywire is available from <www.abc.net/heywire>.

For further information RIRDC youth programs,
please contact Ken Moore at RIRDC on 6271 4100
or email ken.moore@rirdc.gov.au
Canberra motorists could have been forgiven for thinking the Tour de France had come to Australia in early July when a pack of cyclists was spotted traversing the streets of Canberra. In fact they were participants in RIRDC’s Investing in Youth program and were taking part in the ‘Amazing Race’ which was one of the activities in the program’s Canberra workshop.

RIRDC’s Investing in Youth program is in its inaugural year, and involves 10 students who are committed to a future career in agriculture and primary industries. Under the program students receive financial support throughout their studies as well as access to a professional mentor and industry placements so they can gain practical work experience during their degrees.

The Canberra workshop provided the 10 undergraduate students with a valuable opportunity to network and to take part in a range of courses at the Australian Institute of Sport designed to improve their leadership, communication and team building skills. The workshop also included a tour of Parliament House and a meeting with the Hon Dick Adams MP, Chair of the Standing Committee of Primary Industries & Resources. They also had a chance to catch up with Ben Fargher, Chief Executive Officer of the National Farmers’ Federation.

Andrea Craigie travelled to the workshop from Northwest Tasmania and she is currently studying a Bachelor of Agricultural Science in Hobart at the University of Tasmania. Andrea believes the best thing about the workshop in Canberra was that it enabled her to meet up with a group of like minded students all committed to the future of Australia’s agriculture industry.

“Coming to Canberra for the week has been great; I’ve been able to meet like-minded students from around Australia and we are all passionate about being involved in agriculture when we leave university,” Andrea said.

“When I finish my degree I'd like to work in improving the sustainability of agriculture in Australia. Not just from an economic perspective, but also in terms of improving farming's environmental and social sustainability,” Andrea said.

“In particular, I’m interested in exploring how new technologies can be applied on farms to improve their sustainability. I’m also interested in how to improve communication flows with Australian farmers.”

The Investing in Youth program is a collaborative partnership involving RIRDC, the Australian Egg Corporation, Australian Pork Limited, Cotton Research and Development Corporation, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Grains Research and Development Corporation, Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation, Horticulture Australia Limited and the Meat and Livestock Corporation.

Further information: Ken Moore, Acting General Manager, National Rural Issues on T: 02 6271 4127; E: ken.moore@rirdc.gov.au.
Sue Middleton likens the RIRDC Rural Women’s Award to fairy dust – just one sprinkle has enhanced everything she does. In this edition of Diversity, this inspiring farmer from Western Australia shares her thoughts about winning the award, and what it potentially means for the future of biogas in Australia.

Sue, what’s it like being announced as the winner of the 2010 RIRDC Rural Women’s Award?
It’s just a totally overwhelming experience to realise that you’ve been chosen to be the ambassador for the year and that you’re the person that’s going to be really carrying the mantle for all the women that were part of the 2010 program. I feel a great sense of responsibility but also a great sense of joy as well that I’m going to be able to be, in a sense, the ambassador, the spokesperson to be able to talk about things not just in my industry that are really exciting, but also women’s issues in rural Australia.

You are going to be busy over the next 12 months as you use your bursary provided by RIRDC. Tell me a little bit about your project and what you hope to achieve.
My project is about commercializing biogas in the piggery industry. There is a real opportunity at the moment for piggery farmers to capture the methane from pig waste to first capture it and then potentially secondly, turn it into electricity. The third opportunity out of that is the organic fertiliser that’s created as part of that process. So what I want to do with the bursary is to learn more about that process, which is why I am going to New Zealand to look at producers who have done this in a non-subsidised environment at a similar scale to what we have done.

Do you see a positive future in terms of the use of biogas in Australia as a viable and usable means of electricity?
Absolutely. I am absolutely positive that we are going to be in biogas production in livestock industries sometime in the next 2-3 years. I think that there is still a lot of ‘proving-up’ to be done. There are early research projects all over Australia, but the commercialization process is bit that I am really interested in.

What would you say to people thinking about applying for our RIRDC Women’s award?
The first thing I would say is that I know exactly how you are feeling because I was in that exactly in that same place myself. And I spent four years not applying for the award from the time when I was first nominated, and if I have a regret it’s that I wasted four years before doing this. So, jump in, the right time is now. This is like fairy dust. It is something that gets sprinkled over you and enhances your reputation, and it is enormously important if you are either in a community, in an industry, or in your own business and you want to make a difference, this award can help you.

So, my key advice is the right time is now. Get the application form off the website, have a good look at it, you’ve got time to prepare – your application will be due later this year, about October, so start doing your prep now.

Sue, we look forward to talking to you in 12 months to see where your journey has taken you. Congratulations on being named the RIRDC Rural Awards winner for 2010
ALANA JOHNSON believes it’s time to establish a philanthropic foundation for agriculture to enable people to put something back into rural Australia.

Tell me what’s it like to be announced as the runner up of the 2010 RIRDC Women’s Award?
I’m absolutely delighted to be runner up for this award, probably for a couple of reasons. One is there is no sense of being second best in this award. All the women were deserved winners and are winners in my mind, and there was never any sense from the whole group that one person deserved the award more than the other. I felt a great sense of support amongst the group for both Sue as the winner and myself as the runner up to be out there speaking on behalf of rural women, and to be seen to be women who can lead the conversation forward.

Tell me about a couple of things you’ve learnt about yourself, and about agriculture in Australia over the last six months?
Well, I think probably it has been a wonderful learning experience going through the whole series of phases to get to the national awards. My interview, my initial interview in Victoria, I look back on it now and think my ideas were not as concrete as they are now. My ability to actually be clear in explaining in what I wanted to achieve, and the project that I’m interested in, has improved at each stage, and the award has given me a real impetus to actually hone in the message that I want rural Australia to hear.

And to become very competent in delivering that message, so it has been a great learning experience, probably one that you don’t do unless you’re required to front up to these interviews. You sit with your original thoughts and perhaps never clarify them to this point. So that has been a wonderful learning for me.

And your foundation for philanthropy, tell me about that.
Well, I just think the time’s come for us to think in agriculture that there are other ways to achieve development and innovation and to invest in agriculture than just sitting back and waiting for it to be a government priority, or for industry to say let’s invest fund something in it.

Agriculture needs to adapt to a new environment in the future that includes different use of water and resources. Climate change, we have to find some very new ways of doing business, and I think we need to take some imputes as a farming population to drive that ourselves.

To me, philanthropy is one of the mechanisms that can achieve that because it gives a means for individual farmers to actually invest in a philanthropic pursuit that they know will go on forever and can’t be tainted by the government of the day. It can be an independent driver that can pursue all sorts of innovative ways of farming into the future.

Finally, any words of wisdom or advice for women thinking of applying for the 2011 RIRDC Rural Women’s Award?
Well, I think, be bold! I think you don’t have the perfect scripted way of presenting a project initially. To not feel that your idea isn’t worthy to be heard, and to approach applying and therefore the interview process as a learning process. Not to think that if you are not selected as a finalist in your state that you haven’t achieved anything. I think going through the process means that every single applicant actually achieves something. It can only be a learning experience if you approach it that way, and it can only help you take the next step to what you want to achieve for yourself.

Sue and Alana both spoke to Rural Diversity editor Duncan Sheppard

For more information on the Rural Women’s Award contact Edwina Clowes, National Coordinator. T: 0417 727544; E: clowesedwina@bigpond.com. Web: www.ruralwomensaward.gov.au
A passion for community building and working with Indigenous Australians

Catherine Marriott is one of 32 rural leaders in the Australian Rural Leadership Program.
Take a flick through the pages of Catherine Marriott's passport and it's pretty clear you're dealing with an incredibly busy and determined person.

The animal nutritionist grew up on a sheep farm in Victoria, studied in the US, worked in agriculture in Malaysia and now spends her time travelling between northern Australia and South-East Asia where she works as a consultant to the feed-lotting industry in Indonesia and the Philippines.

Catherine is also one of 32 rural leaders from across Australia taking part in the Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP) and is being sponsored by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation.

The Program, now in its 18th year, identifies and works with a network of leaders who have the capacity to lead change and shape the future of rural Australia.

Catherine's work in Indonesia and the Philippines concentrates on helping local farmers with their ration formulation, feedlot management, breeding program and animal handling.

"Feedlot operators in Indonesia are passionate about improving their systems and are very open to my ideas and suggestions, so it makes my work an absolute pleasure," Catherine says.

Having recently returned home, Catherine's next goal is to work with Aboriginal cattle farmers to develop their business plans, and to put in place more effective cattle enterprises.

"To be able to work with Aboriginal farmers is the realisation of a long held dream of mine," Catherine says.

"I feel a great affinity with Aboriginal people because of their culture and strong connection to the land. I believe I'm incredibly lucky to have the opportunity to work closely with them to develop better, more sustainable farming practices.

"My work will also allow me to contribute to the growth of northern Australia's cattle industry which is incredibly important to me."

Catherine describes her involvement in the Australian Rural Leadership Program as a "gift" and an amazing experience to be a part of.

"The ARLP has helped me to understand my strengths a lot better, and to work on those areas that require improvement," Catherine says.

"For example, the program is helping to give me the tools I need to communicate more effectively and succinctly."

According to Catherine, the other skill she has developed is how to approach problem solving.

"It's sometimes easy to stand back from a problem and say that it's too big, and can't be solved by one person."

"My advice to people who think that way is – don't get overwhelmed, start with small changes in your local town, and you will soon start to see changes spread to your local community."

RIRDC's Acting General Manager of National Rural Issues, Ken Moore, says there are some strong synergies between Catherine's work and RIRDC's R&D program.

"An important focus of RIRDC is to invest in R&D that will help foster more dynamic rural communities, including Indigenous communities, so there are strong similarities between what we do, and Catherine's work program."

"We're looking forward to working with her throughout the year."

The Australian Rural Leadership program has a long history of producing leaders to tackle the emerging challenges in rural Australia.

The program works to develop a network of informed, capable and ethical leaders who are able to work collaboratively to advance the interests of their industries, communities and rural Australia in general.

Upon graduation, program participants will become part of the Foundations wide student network which now numbers in excess of 500.

Further information: Ken Moore, Acting General Manager, National Rural Issues, T: 02 6171 4127; E: ken.moore@rirdc.gov.au
If you thought bees were only good at producing honey, think again.

It is estimated around 65 percent of agricultural production in Australia relies on honeybees. A number of major commodity groups, such as almonds, apples, pears, strawberries and cherries depend almost totally on bees for fruit and nut production.

Quite simply, these tiny workers are critical to ensuring the ongoing viability of many of Australia’s agriculture and horticulture industries.

But with the threat of a varroa mite incursion a very real possibility in Australia (Varroa is not present in Australia, but experts are predicting that Varroa mites will enter Australia at some time in the future), research efforts in Australia are focussing on securing the pollination of Australia’s horticultural and agricultural crops into the future on a sustainable and profitable basis.

Central to this research is work being undertaken under the Pollination Program - a co-funded initiative between RIRDC, Horticulture Australia Limited and the Australian Government.

Research and development in this program is primarily aimed at raising awareness to protect pollination in Australia, which includes examining the significant risks associated with relying on incidental pollination (i.e. wild European honeybees) to pollinate agricultural and horticulture crops.

Pollination Aware – The Real Value of Pollination in Australia, (RIRDC Pub. No. 10/081) spells out how an over-reliance on wild honeybees by pollination responsive crop producers in Australia may compromise the future resilience of Australia’s $30 billion horticulture and agriculture sectors.

The report also quantifies the likely demand for paid pollination services should anything happen to Australia’s European honeybee population.

Gerald Martin, Chairman of the Pollination R&D Advisory Committee, says gathering current knowledge on pollination and gaining an overview of supply and demand is seen as critical by the scientific community.

“It is vital that we manage potential risks and determine our future priorities for investment and funding to both maintain - and improve - crop yields and harvest quality,” Mr Martin said.

Australia is fortunate to have a massive population of wild honeybees that pollinate our crops, but if these were decimated by Varroa mite, producers would have limited options in sourcing managed beehives, which would also suffer heavy losses.

“The report also points out that a heavy reliance on this incidental pollination means the yield and quality of produce is often not reaching its potential because plants are not being pollinated at optimal levels – compromising profits.

“Pollination Aware provides for the first time an analysis of pollination-responsive crops in this country and outlines how we can protect our valuable agricultural output by developing a larger apiary industry.”

According to the report, Varroa mite could ‘diminish to insignificance’ the contribution from incidental pollination within 5-10 years.

The study suggests that if pollination by wild European honeybees was eliminated by Varroa mite, almost 480,000 colonies of honeybees would be needed to provide pollination services every September. Peak demand could lift this to 750,000 – far exceeding current apiary capability.

Apiarists would also incur significant costs from the presence of a serious pest or disease to monitor, manage and maintain colony strength. In the United States, the entry of Varroa Mite in 1987 led to an initial three-fold increase in the cost of pollination services due to control measures and high demand.

While the apiary industry’s highest priority is to resist exotic pests and diseases, the report is seen as a first step in addressing both the potential challenges and future opportunities of the pollination industry.

To download or receive a printed copy of the Pollination Aware report or one of the 35 crop-specific case studies visit the Pollination page of the RIRDC website (www.rirdc.gov.au)
Meet Barb, our tough little worker honeybee. Barb is one of 3 billion worker honeybees who are currently hard at work in Victoria pollinating almond blossoms.

She didn’t get there by chance – she would have come on the back of a ute, a semi-trailer or road train from New South Wales, Queensland or Victoria for her one month’s worth of work.

Each August, around 100,000 bee hives are transported to the Robinvale region in northern Victoria to pollinate almond blossoms.

In her month’s work, Barb clocks up more miles than most people travel in a lifetime. She’ll fly upwards of 100 kilometres per day for around 30 days straight (including weekends!) with her wings beating thousands of times per minute.

That’s thousands of kilometres travelled, and millions of flaps in just one month.

No wonder honeybees have a relatively short lifespan of about six weeks when working this hard.

At the centre of this major logistical operation is apiarist Trevor Monson.

Trevor is a member of the RIRDC pollination R&D advisory committee, and has been coordinating pollination services to the almond industry for around 30 years.

In Trevor’s words, coordinating hives during almond season is much like a game of chess. To get the job done, he needs to move his pieces around the board to get the optimal outcome.

“Quality assurance is a major component of my job,” Trevor says.

“It’s not simply a case of sitting back and letting the bees do their job. I’m continually trying different combinations at different farms to get the best outcome for almond growers.”

And it’s a job which is critical to Australia’s small but growing almond industry.

Total almond plantings in Australia are estimated at 27,000 hectares, with exports valued at $75 million.

Paid pollination services are critical to sustaining the growth of the almond industry, which is 100 percent responsive to biological pollination agents.

The almond industry is one of the most proactive agricultural sectors using managed pollination services. It was a fact highlighted in a recent Landline story on ABC Television, which profiled the significant role that bees, like Barb, play maintaining the growth of Australia’s almond industry.

While the almond industry is among the most proactive agricultural sectors using managed pollination services, scientists are now asking whether there are enough bee hives to meet future demand for pollination services by almond orchards.

A research report released this month, Pollination Aware: The Real Value of Pollination in Australia (see opposite), highlights the significant risks associated with relying on incidental pollination and quantifies the likely demand for paid pollination services should anything happen to these escaped European honeybee populations.

Among the most severe threat to agricultural production is that posed by exotic pests and diseases of honeybees, such as the highly destructive Varroa mite, which would decimate Australia’s wild honeybee colonies.

Pollination Aware consolidates available information and for the first time puts a value on pollination services for 35 different commodity groups—including almonds—by analysing the effect of honeybees on production in these industries.

The report is one of the most comprehensive studies ever into the critical role that paid pollination services play underpinning Australia’s horticulture and agriculture industries.

The only thing it doesn’t do is mention specifically the role of Barb. Not that she’s worried, because she’d be too busy to read it anyway.

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Among the most severe threat to agricultural production is that posed by exotic pests and diseases of honeybees, such as the highly destructive Varroa mite, which would decimate Australia’s wild honeybee colonies.

Pollination Aware consolidates available information and for the first time puts a value on pollination services for 35 different commodity groups—including almonds—by analysing the effect of honeybees on production in these industries.

The report is one of the most comprehensive studies ever into the critical role that paid pollination services play underpinning Australia’s horticulture and agriculture industries.

The only thing it doesn’t do is mention specifically the role of Barb. Not that she’s worried, because she’d be too busy to read it anyway.
Living and working in the Riverina rice fields

It’s a frog’s life

Pest extermination is all in a day’s work

They’re small, they’re green and they’re in the front line in the fight to reduce pests in Riverina rice fields.

Rice farming has altered the previously drier landscape, providing extensive aquatic habitats for species such as frogs. These frogs play a major role in minimising damage to rice crops by eating a wide range of pests.

Researchers examined the diets of more than 1000 frogs at Old Coree and Leeton in NSW’s Riverina region by analysing the foods they consumed each day.

They found that on average a frog consumes approximately eight prey items daily such as the rice stink bug, rice root aphid, paddy bug and aquatic snail. In one case, a frog was found to have eaten 69 prey items in 24 hours.

“This report confirms frogs play a very important and positive role on rice farms by naturally controlling pests that are harmful to crops,” Dr John de Majnik, RIRDC Acting General Manager said.

With hundreds of millions of frogs being produced in the Riverina each year, literally billions of insects are being consumed annually in rice-growing areas of the Riverina.

“This research shows that our little green friends are not only an effective means of controlling pests in rice fields, they are extremely cost effective when compared to the cost of pesticides.

“The study also highlights the potential risks of reducing frog numbers on farms, either deliberately or inadvertently, which could potentially result in a rise in rice pests and associated crop damage.”

Dr de Majnik said recent good rains in southern Australia will not only help the future prospects of rice growers’ in the region; it will also help facilitate the growth of frogs which thrive in wet conditions.

“Wet conditions are ideal for frog breeding patterns. In a number of species, breeding is usually triggered by rainfall with females laying their eggs in puddles.”

The study was conducted between Spring 2006 to Autumn 2007. Researchers constructed experimental rice bays to determine frog abundance, and flushed frogs’ stomachs to determine what they had eaten. The main study species were the spotted grass frog and the barking marsh frog.

Rice is the predominant summer crop in the Riverina region, with approximately 120,000 hectares grown annually. About 2,500 family operated farms are located in the Murrumbidgee, Coleambally and Murray Valley irrigation districts.

The study was co-funded by RIRDC, the Ricegrowers’ Association of Australia, and Rice Research Australia. The report Reconciling Farming with Wildlife (RIRDC Pub. No. 10/007) is available on the RIRDC website.

More information: John de Majnik, Acting General Manager, Established Rural Industries; T: 02 6271 4138; Email: john.demajnik@rirdc.gov.au
Managing pastures to reduce laminitis in horses and ponies

It’s hard to imagine that eating pasture could result in a horse becoming crippled, but for horse breeds that are prone to a condition called laminitis, this is a day to day reality.

Laminitis is the second biggest killer of horses after colic and is the most serious disease of the equine foot. It causes the coffin bone of the foot to become detached from the inside of the hoof wall, and sometimes penetrate the sole of the foot. Laminitis causes dreadful suffering and in severe cases euthanasia is necessary.

The RIRDC report *Equine Laminitis – Managing pasture to reduce the risk* (RIRDC Pub. No. 10/063) provides owners with practical information on managing their pastures to reduce the risk of laminitis in horses and ponies.

Most pastures in Australia are tailored for dairy cows, beef cattle and sheep, and are high in sugar, starch and fructan. When these types of pastures are exposed to intense sunshine, drought and cold stress, these carbohydrates can increase three-fold. But with good pasture management, these conditions can be minimised.

Director of the Equine Laminitis Research Unit at the University of Queensland and co-author of the report, Professor Chris Pollitt, says this report represents an important step forward in the understanding of pasture associated laminitis.

“The while we still have more to learn about laminitis, we do know that what the horse or pony has eaten over the last few days, weeks or months may trigger laminitis,” Professor Pollitt said.

“Pasture management techniques such as timely slashing, proper fertilising and avoiding species that are high in sugar, starch and fructan can go a long way to reducing the risk of horses developing laminitis.”

This painful and crippling condition, often called “founder” can affect all breeds of horses, but ponies and horse breeds such as Arabs, Fjords, Morgans and Andalusians are more prone to the condition.

Our complete range of horse publications can be found on our website www.rirdc.gov.au.

Further information: Nigel Perkins, Research Manager, RIRDC Horse Program, T: 0437 935 376; E: nigel@ausvet.com.au

A better understanding of the links between pasture consumption and laminitis will lead to a more unified approach and rational preventive and treatment strategies, by owner, veterinarian and farrier. Photo courtesy Professor Chris Pollitt
Drinking 19 cups of coffee in may not be your cup of tea, or coffee, but that’s exactly what researchers have done to uncover how Australian coffee growers can produce the ultimate cuppa.

The Effect of Coffee Cherry Maturing on Taste (RIRDC Pub. No. 10/079) analyses how Australian coffee growers can produce better tasting coffee to suit local conditions and capitalise on the growing espresso market. The report is expected to be a valuable tool for coffee growers in Australia who are looking to develop a unique and high quality espresso coffee consistent with the special characteristics of their growing region.

Researchers taste tested a range of roasted coffees which had their cherries harvested at different stages of their growing cycles. Their aim was to determine when is the best time to harvest coffee cherries in order to achieve the tastiest cups of coffee for the growing espresso market and the traditional plunger market.

They rated the coffees according to five criteria; sweetness, balance, body, flavour and aftertaste.

The coffees that received the highest ratings were those which were picked when the coffee cherry was at its prime red stage (coffee cherries go through five maturity stages – green, semi-coloured, prime red, purple and tree-dried ‘naturals’).

The report shows how growers could potentially achieve a different coffee taste by harvesting their coffee cherries at different stages of their growing cycle. It also highlights the potential of dry processing prime red cherries which could have major implications for growers in terms of reducing their water use.

This study is the Australian sub-tropical coffee industry’s first commercial-scale look at the effects of coffee cherry maturity on taste. Further studies are expected to follow that will lead to further improvements in management and processing techniques.

Further information: Alan Davey, Research Manager RIRDC. T: 02 6271 4126. E: alan.davey@rirdc.gov.au
They may possess weird and wonderful names, like the Bridal Creeper, Chicken Needle Grass, Jelly Bean Tree and Monkey Apple, but their presence is anything but welcome on Australian farms.

Weeds such as these pose a major economic and environmental problem for Australian farmers. Invasive weeds displace native species, contribute significantly to land degradation, and reduce farm and forest productivity. In fact, weeds are estimated to cost the Australian economy around $4 billion each year.

RIRDC’s new National Weeds and Productivity Program has been established to tackle this significant economic and environmental problem. The Australian Government is investing $11.4 million into the program from June 2010 to June 2012.

RIRDC recently held a national workshop involving industry, government and research representatives to develop a five-year plan for the National Weeds and Productivity Program. The workshop gave stakeholders the opportunity to have their say on the types of weeds research that the new program could undertake to better position Australia to manage and respond to weed challenges and impacts. The five-year plan will guide investment as well as provide goals and potential investment opportunities for future weeds R&D.

Ken Moore, RIRDC Acting General Manager National Rural Issues, said the workshop was successful, as it helped identify the main issues RIRDC will need to consider in the development of a five year plan for the program.

“The workshop was the beginning of ongoing dialogue with land managers, research bodies and knowledge brokers about weeds, agricultural productivity and the environment,” Mr Moore said.

“The wealth of knowledge around the table on weeds research, policy, extension and on-ground adoption will help RIRDC develop a research program that addresses the agricultural and environmental challenges of invasive weeds.”

Mr Moore said the workshop addressed a range of high level issues, such as the need to ensure information about weed control is accessible and usable; developing alternative uses to chemicals, and the need to identify strategies to identify new weeds and track and contain them.

The first step of the program will involve RIRDC publishing a compendium containing reports on 39 weed projects that were commissioned by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. It will also capture the research outputs of the previous cooperative research centres for weeds.

Opportunity knocks for new rural industries

The potential impact of climate change is an issue which affects all our nation’s farmers.

Higher temperatures, increased evaporation, more variable rainfall and increased extreme climatic events are all predicted to impact on agricultural output in Australia.

These changing weather conditions, particularly in the nation’s south, also have the potential to substantially alter the mix of agricultural industries across many regions of Australia, and even threaten the viability of some existing agricultural industries.

However, these changing weather conditions could also create significant opportunities for new rural industries which are better adapted and suited to expected future climates.

RIRDC’s New Rural Industries for Future Climates, launched at this year’s national ABARE conference, finds new rural industries provide the potential for a transformational shift in the way we adapt to future climates.

The report, which focuses on six different climate regions in Australia, profiles the types of crops which require less water and can tolerate periods when irrigation cannot be supplied.

Crops such as jojoba, pomegranates, capers, dates (pictured), mustards, tree crops and Australian bush foods like quandong, bush tomato, desert lime are all expected to be suited to hotter and dryer weather conditions.

Many of these new industry options have a competitive advantage over existing agricultural industries in warmer and drier future environments, due to their drought tolerance, salinity tolerance, water use efficiency and resilience to low irrigation water availability.

As part of the report, researchers undertook an in-depth analysis of olives and compared them to conventional irrigated crops from the perspective of water use efficiency and farm income.

The report found that at similar irrigation allocations, there were consistent returns in terms of gross value of production per mega litre. However, returns differed significantly when irrigation allocations were reduced.

For example, at 50 percent water allocations, the gross value of production per mega litre applied for the olive orchard was double that of the conventional irrigated fruit crops.

The comparison helps to highlight the extent to which resilient irrigated crops, such as olives, will be suited to the lower and more variable irrigation water regimes expected in future climate scenarios for southern Australia.

New Rural Industries for Future Climates will serve as an invaluable tool for farmers who have started, or are thinking about diversifying their operations to reduce the risk associated with climate change and associated extreme climatic events.

The report, along with a four page fact sheet, is available on the RIRDC website.

Further information, Dr Roslyn Prinsley, General Manager, New and Emerging Rural Industries. T: 02 6271 4120; E: roslyn.prinsley@rirdc.gov.au

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Dates (Phoenix dactylifera) have a much higher salinity tolerance than olives, pomefruit and grapes. The date palm is drought resistant but has a high water requirement for full production, with mature crops in central Australia estimated to require 27 ML/ha. Consequently, the date palm is suited to areas where there is a large quantity of lower quality water available, and could potentially use recycled water. The date plant is tolerant of high and low temperature extremes, and requires long, hot, dry summers for ripening and harvest. The date plant can grow on a wide range of soil types, but free-draining soils are preferable. (Source: New Rural Industries for Future Climates (RIRDC Pub. No. 10/010)
In these times of challenging environmental and economic conditions, rural industries need to be innovative to survive.

Many new and emerging rural industries had no industry organisation to support them. This was the driving force behind the formation of a new body called New Rural Industries Australia (NRIA). Through increased cooperation, coordination and education NRIA aims to create an environment for the development and capacity-building of new, innovative Australian rural industries and to maximise the economic benefits our nation gains from such industries.

The value of new and emerging industries is estimated to be in excess of $1 billion, with an export value estimated at $465 million or six per cent of total Australian agricultural exports. NRIA can provide support so that these new and emerging industries can not only be viable, but flourish.

**Website**

NRIA’s website, which it launched in June, has a wealth of information on a range of topics including industry links, grants and funding, starting a new business, and facts and figures on a range of new and emerging plant and animal industries.

For more information or to register as a member go to: www.nria.org.au.

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**2010 Conference and Expo**

NRIA will be hosting a conference and expo to highlight the products and diversity of new and emerging rural industries across Australia and to bring about more collaboration between the new rural industries. This event will provide an excellent opportunity for industry interaction and exchange of information. The expo will be open to all allied industries and also to any new rural industries to showcase their products.

Some of the topics to be covered include:

- market linkages and value chains
- new rural industries for future climates
- business models help with new rural businesses.

There will also be a field trip to nearby rural industries.

The conference/ expo is on 28 to 30 November at Jupiters, Gold Coast. Early bird registration is $350 plus gst, and closes on 30 September.

Further information on the conference can be found at the website: www.nria2010.com.au.

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**CONFERENCE conference EXPO expo**

**Register NOW.**

Visit the website: www.nria2010.com.au

ASN Events. T: 03 5983 2400
Not all farmers have a silver spoon in their toolkit, but truffle grower Wayne Haslam never leaves home without one this time of year. Winter is harvest time for truffles, and Wayne uses the spoon to delicately uncover and remove this precious fungus from the ground.

Wayne is one of many truffle growers who have opened up their truffières (truffle farm or plantation) to the public in order to raise awareness of the truffle and the industry. On our visit to Wayne’s truffière near Canberra we followed the truffle dog who led Wayne to the truffles, just beneath the surface at the base of oak and hazelnut trees. Once harvested, truffles start to lose moisture and their aroma and need to be used within 3 weeks of harvest. We learnt that truffles are best wrapped in a paper towel and stored in a jar in the fridge, with eggs or rice so that the flavour infuses into them. Truffle contains glutamic acid, a flavour enhancer and goes with any food.

This year is a bumper one for truffles, with about 2 tonne expected from approximately 600ha. Truffles of up to one kg each have been found, and at up to $3 per gram, that’s $3000 in value. A truffle the size of a large hen egg weighs about 50 gram and would cost about $150, but you only need about 5 grams for a main serving. Two thirds of the truffles produced in Australia are exported and the industry is predicted to be worth $10 million by 2013.

Black Truffles (Tuber melanosporum) have been grown in Australia since the early nineties. They grow in a Mediterranean climate, requiring significant hot summer weather and cold and frosty weather from June to August when they are harvested. Truffières consist of oaks and hazelnuts, (inoculated with the truffle fungus as seedlings) and the truffles grow adjacent to the root, taking at least four to five years before they produce. Truffles – When quality is paramount

RIRDC has worked closely with the Australian Truffle Growers Association since its inception in 2006. The Truffle Growers Association provides a platform for industry communication, education and consumer information (www.trufflegrowers.com.au). RIRDC, in conjunction with industry, have prepared a 3 year strategic development plan. Priority areas identified in the plan are:

• the development of a draft truffle grading standard for the industry

• liaising with Australian Quarantine Inspection Service on the ban on the import of potentially damaging truffles

• research into truffle rot and other production issues

• consumer education, accreditation standards and promotion of Australian truffles

RIRDC is supporting another two research projects looking at the genetic diversity of truffle stock in Australia and an electronic nose project. Low genetic diversity in truffles could limit their capability to form productive associations with tree species, genotypes and site interactions, resulting in poor yields for farmers. The diversity will be compared to that in Europe to assess whether the Australian truffles may suffer from a genetic bottleneck, impairing their ability to produce large truffle yields. The electronic nose project will utilise the latest nano technology used in explosive sniffer systems to determine the key volatile organic compounds in truffles which can be used to characterise the onset of truffle rot, truffle quality for grading purposes and when truffles are ready for harvesting. This will then be used to develop a highly sensitive, reproducible and selective electronic gas nano-sensor which can be used for various applications in the field.

Further information, Alan Davey, Senior Research Manager, New Plant Products. T: 6271 4126; E: alan.davey@rirdc.gov.au

Truffle dusted pasta.
Herb and spice growers are being encouraged to have their say on a proposal to implement a statutory research and development levy.

The levy will underpin the implementation of the Research and Development Strategy for the Australian Herb and Spice Industry 2006–2011.

The proposed levy will be payable on all culinary herbs & spices whether fresh-cut, potted, processed or dried, produced and sold primarily for human consumption (except for parsley, shallots, chilli, and ginger).

The proposed R&D Levy is modelled on existing levy arrangements. The proposed levy figure is 0.5% of the value of the product at the first point sale, calculated as follows:

- Domestic Levy 0.5% of the gross sale value at first point of sale
- Export Charge 0.5% of the “free on board” (FOB) value
- This equates to 50 cents out of $100 of produce sold, or one cent on a $2 sale.
- The target commencement date for the proposed R&D Levy is 1st July 2011.

The Australian Herb and Spice Industry Association has been holding a series of information sessions to get growers feedback on the proposed levy. Later this year after these sessions, the Australian Electoral Commission will hold a secret ballot involving all registered industry participants so that they can vote on the proposal.

Further information, including a copy of the Herb and Spice Levy proposal discussion paper presenting the case for the levies, is available on the AHSIA website www.ahsia.org.au

Further information, Alan Davey, Senior Research Manager, New Plant Products. T: 6271 4126, E: alan.davey@rirdc.gov.au
New research into tea tree oil gives hope to skin cancer patients

People have long reached for a bottle of tea tree oil to treat ailments such as inflammations and bacteria, but a new research study, funded by RIRDC, has uncovered the role tea tree oil may play in the future treating people’s non-melanoma skin cancers.

A three year study by the University of Western Australia’s Oil Research Group, and published in RIRDC’s Anticancer Activity of Tea Tree Oil (RIRDC Pub. No. 10/60), is an important step in the fight to treat people with skin cancers.

The researchers found solid tumours grown under the skin of mice and treated with a tea tree oil formulation caused inhibition of tumour growth and tumour regression within a day of treatment. The tea tree oil formulation only produced mild side effects in the form of skin irritation which disappeared within days of the treatment finishing.

According to the UWA’s principal researcher, Dr Sara Greay, the results from the study are particularly exciting.

“If topical tea tree oil can slow down aggressive solid tumours grown under the skin in mice, then its potential to be effective against cancers that grow within the skin is enormous,” Dr Greay said.

“The potential next step is a clinical trial to test tea tree oil formulations on people with precancerous lesions, with the aim of preventing the development of skin cancer”

Australia has the highest incidence of skin cancer worldwide with around 434,000 Australians treated for one or more non-melanoma skin cancers every year. In addition, in 2001, Cancer Council Australia estimated the treatment of non-melanoma skin cancer cost $264 million.

According to Dr Roslyn Prinsley, General Manager of RIRDC’s New Rural Industries portfolio, the study could be a major boost for the tea tree oil industry.

“Aside from the potential health benefits this research has helped uncover, demonstrating a link between tea tree oil and the effective treatment of skin cancers would be a major step forward for Australia’s tea tree oil industry in terms of its profile and financial viability,” Dr Prinsley said.

RIRDC’s Tea Tree Oil program aims to support the continued development of a profitable and environmentally sustainable Australian tea tree oil industry. RIRDC has produced a number of reports which are available on our website that investigate the potential health benefits of this popular natural essential oil.

Further information, Dr Roslyn Prinsley, General Manager, New and Emerging Rural Industries. T: 02 6271 4120, E: roslyn.prinsley@rirdc.gov.au
We are all familiar with terminology to describe the flavour and aroma of wine, such as floral, citrus, pepper, blackcurrant or tropical fruit bouquet. Now a similar concept has been applied to a range of native foods.

For example, Davidson Plum has an earthy scent like fresh beetroot and Wattle seed has the aroma of toasted coffee grounds, sweet spice, raisin and chocolate.

These are the findings of a new publication containing the first ever Australian native food wheel. This is a major breakthrough for the native food industry, as for the first time they have a way of describing with common terminology the tastes and smells of 16 native foods including fruits, berries, herbs, spices and seeds.

The native food wheel means that producers can ‘talk the same language’ about their foods, which will help them take a consistent, whole of industry approach to marketing, manufacturing and promoting their products. It is also a great tool for chefs, food connoisseurs and everyday consumers of native foods who now have a guide that helps them choose the native food that’s right for their dishes and their tastebuds.

In all, 112 different sensory descriptions are included in the ‘technical dictionary’, from the well known such as ‘fruity’, ‘nutty’ and ‘savoury’ to the less well known such as ‘forest floor’, ‘roast chicken’ and ‘bubble gum’.

The flavour wheel was developed by ten sensory experts who tasted and smelt their way through 16 native foods, with their findings being endorsed by industry.

The publication Defining the Unique Flavours of Australian Native Foods (RIRDC. Pub. No. 10/062), which also includes the wheel can be found at www.rirdc.gov.au.

For more information contact Alison Saunders, Research Manager, Native Foods; T: 02 6271 4124; E: alison.saunders@rirdc.gov.au

Defining the Unique Flavours of Australian Native Foods
Publication no: 10-062 Pages: 32

Australian native plant foods provide new and exciting eating experiences for consumers and have the potential to re-position ‘Australian cuisine’ as a contemporary food choice for consumers worldwide. The development of a common set of flavour and aroma descriptors and characteristics was identified as a key priority for the Australian native food industry. This research assists in the development and supply of product information to support market access and market growth for this emerging industry. This work was targeted so that a concise, consistent and accurate marketing message of the flavours of these ingredients could be delivered to customers. This report details the results of the development of the first Australian native flavour wheel and sensory descriptions for sixteen of the key commercial native food species including fruits, berries, herbs, spices and seeds.
RIRDC is the proud sponsor of the Australian Diversified Farmer of the Year award which is part of the Kondinin Group and ABC Rural’s Australian Farmer of the Year awards.

Whether it’s to fulfill a life-long ambition, to spread the financial risk or to educate others about primary production, many farmers across Australia are diversifying from their core business to include another type of enterprise.

“It’s not any easy or risk-free decision to branch out from the business you know the best to add a whole new venture into the mix,” RIRDC Acting General Manager Ken Moore said.

“But a growing number of Australian farmers have taken the leap of faith and successfully combined farming with a variety of other business types such as hospitality, retail and eco-tourism.

“RIRDC wants to acknowledge these farmers for their courage, innovation, and foresight and in the process find out what are the keys to a winning diversified business.”

Entrants in the Diversified Farmer of the Year award need to develop a short application demonstrating why they should be considered for the award.

For more information visit www.kondinin.com.au/events

RIRDC Rural Women’s Award 2011
opened 1 August 2010
 closes 15 October 2010

Who and what is RIRDC?
The Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) is an Australian Government statutory authority. Our aim is to maximise knowledge outcomes for industry and government from R&D investment in:
• New Rural Industries
• Established Rural Industries
• National Rural Issues
Our vision is for a more profitable, dynamic and sustainable rural sector.

We focus our R&D investments at the applied end of the innovation pipeline to ensure we maximise outcomes for the benefit of rural industries and communities.

Through our wide network and extensive advisory committee structure, RIRDC is able to identify the strategic knowledge needs of stakeholders and select and manage the best R&D investments to meet those needs.

Rural Diversity is RIRDC’s corporate newsletter. It is distributed by direct mail to over 4,000 subscribers from the research community, industry, government, as well as farmers, libraries and consultants.

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