

MĀNUKA

Leptospermum scoparium var. *scoparium*

THE SUSTAINABLE AND ECONOMICAL CHOICE

In light of proposed regulation requiring stock exclusion from rivers and water bodies, mānuka offers an option that can generate income. In addition it has the potential to improve water quality, the aesthetic value of the landscape and biodiversity.

Mānuka production can be considered a good option for New Zealand farmers seeking alternatives for marginal farmland. This type of land is often prone to erosion and drought. It tends to have a shallow layer of topsoil and poor grass growth, resulting in low stocking rates and making it difficult to manage. In many cases there are limited other economically viable options for erosion control, outside of forestry.

Mānuka's root holding capacity of up to a metre of soil is able to protect vulnerable land from erosion and it has the potential to result in 80 to 90 per cent less erosion than pasture.

WHERE TO GROW MĀNUKA?

Mānuka can be a good species to grow on marginal farmland in erosion-prone hill country. However, the species does well in many other places and can be planted on flat, rolling and steep land. It can grow under a wide range of site conditions, but good nectar is only produced when the plants have good moisture levels and are sheltered and warm. Mānuka produces higher quality honey in low pH and low fertility soils.



Photo: Manuka Health New Zealand

HONEY WITH UNIQUE QUALITIES

In 2006, methylglyoxal was discovered by scientists as the dominant antibacterial element of mānuka honey. This component gives mānuka anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory properties that are different to other types of honey. These special features make this honey increasingly important and worth protecting and there are various grading systems that assure purity and quality the honey.

The Unique Mānuka Factor (UMF®) is one of them. It is an internationally registered trademark that can be used only by licensed users who must meet set criteria. Another certification that is frequently used is MGO™, which indicates how many milligrams of methylglyoxal the honey contains. Pure mānuka honey of a high quality level commands a greater market price, so the higher the rating the more expensive the honey usually is.



Photo: Muriel Bendel

ABOUT MĀNUKA

Mānuka (*Leptospermum scoparium* var. *scoparium*), also known as kāhikatoa or tea tree, is indigenous to New Zealand and Australia. Most Australian forms are different from those found in New Zealand. However, plants from Tasmania are very similar, if not identical, to varieties found on New Zealand's South Island.

To maintain the plants natural distribution and gene pool in a given area, it is preferable to source plants from local seeds for local use. Sometimes native plants that aren't sourced locally can hybridise with local plants. If this happens on a large scale the local gene pool can be swamped, resulting in the loss of local genes and plant characteristics.



FUNDING

Waikato Regional Council may fund up to 35 per cent for approved projects that help prevent erosion and improve water quality. In certain areas, this can increase to 70 per cent and include land retirement and planting mānuka. The key focus areas for these kinds of projects include: Awakino, Lower Mokau, Mangaotaki, Honikiwi and Te Pahu. Contact Waikato Regional Council to find out what kind of funding is available in your area.

In addition, mānuka plantations are eligible for funding under the Afforestation Grant Scheme (AGS). The AGS provides \$1300/hectare to successful applicants towards the establishment of trees on erodible pastoral land in return for the first 10 years' worth of carbon credits. If you have questions about the scheme, email funding@mpi.govt.nz.

HOW TO GET STARTED

Seek advice

Seek professional advice early on by contacting:

- Waikato Regional Council on 0800 800 401
- Comvita on 0800 504 959
- Manuka Farming NZ on 027 626 8521
- Manuka Health on 07 870 6555
- your local bee keeper.

Pick a suitable area to establish the plantation

- Mānuka Farming NZ recommends 20 hectares as the minimum area for growing mānuka and producing high quality mānuka honey economically.
- Assess the presence of competitive nectar sources during the mānuka flowering season and how that will impact the purity and quality of the honey that will be produced. Bees can forage up to 5 to 6 kilometres from a hive and prefer other nectar sources, such as clover.
- Consider trialling different species and sites before fully committing.

Make a planting plan

- Research the type of mānuka species most appropriate for the geographical area and able to thrive in local conditions. Planting mānuka sourced from the local area will help to maintain the genetic makeup of the local mānuka.
- Establish possible shelter belts to reduce wind impacts.
- Aim for a planting density of around 1100 stems per hectare, or 3 by 3 metre spacings, which will cost an estimated \$2000 to \$3200 per hectare to establish.

Prepare the site for planting

- On weedy sites or recent cutover sites a pre-plant spray will usually be required before the seedlings are planted. This includes weeds like gorse, tobacco weed or wilding pines. At least one post-plant weed spray will also be required.
- Ensure the site is free of pest animals, especially of goats, sheep, possums, hares and pigs. And exclude stock.
- Establish suitable tracks to access and/or transport hives in and out.

DID YOU KNOW?

- It costs roughly \$2000 to \$3200 per hectare to establish a mānuka plantation.
- The operating costs are around \$20 to \$45 per hectare per year.
- A hectare of mānuka produces 20 to 40 kilograms of honey annually.
- Plants start flowering after 2 to 6 years and have a lifecycle of 25 years.
- The flower period of mānuka is usually around 6 to 8 weeks.
- Maximum potential for honey collection is usually achieved after seven years.
- The price of mānuka honey varies hugely depending on the quality levels of honey, ranging from \$18-\$22/kg, for mid-range \$30-\$50/kg, and top range \$50-\$100/kg.



CONTACTS

If you have any questions or want to find out how Waikato Regional Council can help you, please contact a catchment management officer for your area on 0800 800 401.

MORE INFO

- waikatoregion.govt.nz
- comvita.co.nz
- manukafarmingnz.co.nz
- manukahealth.co.nz
- kauriparknurseries.co.nz
- treesforbeesnz.org
- umf.org.nz
- mpi.govt.nz