



NEW POLLINATION TARIFF FOR 2022

The Western Cape Bee Industry Association, the WCBA, has approved a new recommended pollination tariff of R 1 121.00 (plus VAT) for the 2022 pollination season.

Local and international factors, such as high inflationary pressures, the lingering economic effects of the Covid pandemic and the war in Ukraine, are conspiring to create a perfect storm of rising costs for all sectors of the agricultural industry. Beekeepers, who provide pollination services, are similarly burdened with rapidly increasing overheads. The WCBA, however, has sought to keep the new pollination tariff as low as possible, and this year's increase is only 10% up on last year.

The chairperson of the WCBA, Riette Van Zyl, says, "we are intent on aligning the pollination services provided by our beekeepers with the needs of the farmers who produce our food". Van Zyl adds that "the beekeeping industry can play an increasingly critical role in local agriculture by helping to optimise food production".

Determining the pollination tariff is a carefully calibrated process. Among the input costs incurred by beekeepers are the labour and resources spent on preparing honeybee colonies to meet the rigorous criteria laid down by the WCBA for effective pollination. This includes the purchase of supplementary sugar feed to build up the colonies for pollination, as they emerge from a cold, wet winter to take on the challenge of multiplying a profusion of food crops in spring.

Among other incidental costs incurred by pollinating beekeepers is the sheer damage done to beehives as they are transported from orchard to pasture. Potential honey production is also lost if colonies are weakened while in pollination, as often happens if they are subjected to reckless pesticide spraying or lengthy spells on mono-floral crops.

But clearly the most punitive current cost increase, overriding every other financial consideration this year, is the volatile fuel price, hitting new peaks because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. For most beekeepers, fuel is their most significant operational expense - especially for those who are having to spread their beehives far and wide because of forage scarcity, typically caused by the relentless removal of one of the most valuable sources of bee forage in rural areas - the Eucalyptus plantations. The often random felling of Eucalyptus trees is taking a great toll on the commercial beekeeping industry, and unintentionally, jeopardising the future of honeybee pollination at a time of inexorable demand.

The Chair of the WCBA, Riette van Zyl, assures food growers, however, of a commitment by the organisation's pollinator beekeepers "to provide a service of the highest professional standard".

To this end, the WCBA is continuing to bolster its pollination standards, including the roll-out of a pollination inspection service, which will help reassure farmers that honeybee colonies of optimal strength are being deployed on their food crops.

Farmers are advised to note that the recommended pollination for 2022 is for the deciduous fruit sector only and covers a period of fourteen days. Beekeepers and blueberry farmers are encouraged to negotiate a higher rate between the respective parties because of the specific complexities of preparing honeybee colonies for blueberry pollination.

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