



Beekeeper Eddie McKee. Picture: Allan Reinikka ROK171018ahoney14

HEALTHIER HONEY: tea trees good for bees study finds

by [TIM HOWARD \(/PROFILE/THOWARD/\)](#)

9th Nov 2018 9:40 AM



AN INDUSTRY-commissioned study has found honey from bees foraging on tea trees has higher levels of antioxidants and sustained anti-microbial activity compared to other honeys.

Dr David Rudd from the South Cross University's School of Environment, Science and Engineering conducted the research trials at Jenbrook's tea tree plantation in the Bungawalbyn Valley region in NSW.

Jenbrook Pty Ltd, which commissioned the work for Meluka Honey, has natural indigenous tea tree plants and a large tea tree plantation on the property and native bees in the area.

Many tea tree plantations were planted in the Clarence Valley and North Coast, where the plants are a native species, during the 1970s and 80s.

Jenbrook general manager Bryan Easson has worked closely with the University's Analytical Research Laboratory in Lismore on ethical evidence-based production for many years, and wanted to know whether honey produced from bees foraging on tea tree would contain antioxidant qualities and benefit the bees.

Dr Rudd said his research not only found the Meluka Honey combined strong immediate anti-oxidant activity significantly higher than generic honey, but also how foraging on tea tree plants benefited the honeybees. As he expected, a bioactive monoterpene from tea tree was present in the honey.

"We found bees foraging on Melaleuca trees produced a honey that combines immediate anti-oxidant activity and a significant sustained anti-microbial activity even in young honey, without having to wait for the honey to mature," Dr Rudd said.

"A diet of Melaleuca trees is slightly different to what bees usually feed on so we wanted to conduct gut microbe analysis in case there were any problems for the bees, but we found the slight changes in the gut suggested the bees could handle tea tree really well and actually gives the bees a slightly higher immune function, making them more resistant to bacterial infections and viral infections without affecting the gut metabolic function.

"So tea tree within the diet actually acted as a probiotic for metabolism, increasing beneficial immune defensive bacteria while maintaining nectar metabolism bacteria within the honeybees' gut."

Dr Rudd also gave the taste of the honey his tick of approval.

"It has a fresher lighter aspect to the taste, similar to the freshness you have in tea-tree cough lollies - it tastes quite nice," he said.

During the research trials, tea tree was provided to the honeybees as a diet supplement and honeybees were also allowed to naturally forage throughout the old growth plantations.

Dr Rudd's findings were detailed in a report entitled: *Chemical profile and bioactive properties of Tea Tree (Melaleuca alternifolia) based honey products: 'HON-E-VITE' Active Serum and Australian Native Melaleuca Alternifolia Honey*, which was commissioned by Jenbrook Pty Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of EVE Investments.