

**September 22– for immediate release**

## **EAST GIPPSLAND APIARIST IN THE RUNNING FOR YOUNG AGRIBUSINESS LEADER OF THE YEAR**

Ben Murphy has been a proactive agribusiness leader for eight years, the last two of those in the capacity of the owner-operator of Tambo Valley Honey, based in Bruthen, East Gippsland.

A combination of drought, bushfires and covid-19 has made 2020 possibly one of the most challenging times to be in business in Gippsland. Deservedly, Ben's determination and achievements since taking over the iconic honey brand have been recognised, as he is named one of four finalists in the 2020 Young Agribusiness Leader of the Year Award.

Part of Food & Fibre Gippsland's annual Excellence in Agribusiness Awards program, this prestigious accolade is proudly supported by the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation (ARLF).

Amongst a very competitive field of entries, Ben's leadership impressed the judges when he detailed how, over these past two years with the support of his wife Stacey, he has transformed their honey enterprise.

Ben has created high value sales channels, opened up new business opportunities in pollination of other agricultural products, positioned Gippsland agribusiness as a supporter of small rural communities and developed action plans for future potential threats to the honey sector.

Tambo Valley Honey manages 1200 hives and recently expanded its own packaging lines to showcase Gippsland's vast floral varieties. So now instead of buying generic supermarket honey, customers can try and taste different flavour strains of honey directly sourced from across the region.

This value-add strategy has been very successful and has required Ben to establish new networks in packaging, labelling, drive continuity of production and take on marketing activity for niche, value add products.

Collaboration and knowledge sharing have played an important part in this journey for the business, with other value add pioneers like Sallie Jones and Steve Ronalds from Gippsland Jersey making themselves available as mentors in the process.

Keen to diversify, Ben identified the opportunity to grow Tambo Valley Honey's business and cash flow by transferring 1000 hives 800km away from their regular home base to pollinate the Robinvale almond orchards, on the south bank of the Murray River in north western Victoria.

Acting on this and other opportunities outside the region has built healthier hives over the winter months and has increased revenue and profit in the normally quieter September & October period.

It is estimated that over two thirds of the people who work in Gippsland's agribusiness sector live in and contribute to small rural communities. Like many agribusinesses in the region, Ben is a big believer in giving back wherever and however he can.

Following the January bushfires in East Gippsland, Ben joined with three other local producers to provide needy families in a number of communities with boxes of fresh local food, including Tambo Valley Honey.

Ben describes this gift of giving as a way he was able to take his own team's mind off the impact of the devastating bush fires.

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## MEDIA RELEASE

When the original chair of Bushfire Recovery Victoria, Ken Lay, visited Bairnsdale in the middle of the immediate fire crisis, Ben attended a private meeting with a selection of other agribusiness owners to share details about the impact the bush fires had on agribusinesses and small communities in East Gippsland. Some of the content provided in that meeting has been included in an official report tabled in the Royal Commission into the January 2020 bushfires.

Ben gives back to the industry in many ways, including helping prepare for bio-security risks.

Keenly aware of the precious and important role bees play in the world's food ecosystem, he has been deeply embedded in developing action plans for the possibility of varroa mite breaching Australian bio-security barriers.

To date, Australia is the only populated country in the world that has not been impacted by the Varroa Destructor and a unique device is under development to help manage the threat and minimise its impact if the mites were to ever appear.

The “Purple Hive” is a solar powered artificial intelligence device, trained to detect varroa mite in real time so that the industry can prevent its spread if it were to make its way into Australia.

Tambo Valley Honey hives are being used to develop and validate the technology behind this device at a commercial level.

Increasingly Ben’s knowledge and leadership in the industry is being utilised across social media, conferences, and mainstream media activity to continue to educate on the direct link between healthy forests, healthy bees and the food on our plates.

He is also active in conversations with the timber industry to identify strategies that allow both sectors to coexist in Gippsland’s forests.

This commitment, passion and multi-dimensional support for the industry are just a few of the many reasons why Ben Murphy appears on the finalist list the Young Agribusiness Leader in the 2020 Excellence in Agribusiness Awards.

The winner, to be announced on November 20, will claim a place in the ARLF’s highly regarded TRAIL Course - a cross-sector, challenge-based leadership program for Australia’s future emerging rural leaders, valued at \$10,450.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT JODY O’BRIEN 0416 222 899.**

Pics: Ben Murphy, Stacey Murphy (in pink) and Easton Murphy (their young son)

Pic Credit: Jody O’Brien / Food & Fibre Gippsland