



Council of the
European Union

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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Quality concerns related to honeys imported to the EU and the
competitiveness of apiculture sector in Europe
– *Requested by the Hungarian, Bulgarian, Czech, Polish and Slovenian
delegations*

Delegations will find in the Annex a document submitted by the Hungarian, Bulgarian, Czech, Polish and Slovenian delegations to be presented under "Any other business" at the Council ("Agriculture and Fisheries") at its session on 14 December 2015.

**Quality concerns related to honeys imported to the EU
and the competitiveness of apiculture sector in Europe**

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The European Union is not self-sufficient in honey production; import is needed as well. The honey production of the European Union is approximately 200,000 tonnes annually, barely surpassing the quantity of honey imported to the EU. Data from past years show that there is a steady increase in imports, while production in the European Union stagnates. Imports from certain exporting countries arrive at such a low price which raises questions concerning the quality of the product. The labelling system, which is practically hiding the exact origin of the imported product, does not help to allay the concerns related to quality. If the information on origin provided to consumers is not adequate, customers will mostly base their decisions primarily on price, which eventually can be detrimental to quality aspects.

It is important for honey to be a pure and natural product; it must not contain any added substances. Continuous inspections aimed at strengthening consumer trust have a particular importance for quality. Identifying fraud is a very complex process; one parameter on its own cannot be evaluated, thus the analysis of several tests (organoleptic, analytical and microscopic examination) is needed.

Therefore, we urge the European Commission to take a more active role regarding the usage of state of the art laboratory methods. We believe that a joint action is needed at the European level in order to ensure the necessary financial and technical provisions. The only way we can meet requirements relating to food safety and designation of origin, and guarantee the exclusion of fake products from the internal market is by using the most up-to-date techniques. Besides the improvement of inspection capacities, it is crucial that the databases - through which fraudulent practices can be detected - are expanded and integrated at the European level. The frequency of inspections is to be determined by way of risk analysis, and the number of inspections should be increased in the case of importers and regions showing shortcomings and deficiencies. Furthermore, it is important to spread good practices related to quality, for example the use of trademarks, guarantee seals and specially shaped producers' honey jars.

It is crucial to pay particular attention to continuous traceability in the interest of the consumers, the European bee population and honey producers. Consumers should receive proper information so that they can buy safe products with known origin. This might also contribute to the boosting of the entire European agriculture. More stringent rules are needed in the EU on the origin labelling of honey and honey products. The country of origin of the imported product should be specifically labelled, as follows:

- 'blend of honeys originating in EU countries',
- 'blend of honeys originating in non-EU countries (*naming of the countries*)',
- 'blend of honeys originating in EU and non-EU countries (*naming of the non-EU country/countries*)'.

In the case of honey blends, we think that the mandatory indication of the proportion of the honeys originating from different countries is necessary. It would also be important to lay down that each component originating in a particular country must be in conformity with the requirements in itself. It is a clear expectation that honey blends should be the blend of raw materials, which individually meet the requirements laid down in the honey directive.

Moreover, it is important to note that the above-mentioned problems affect not only the actors of the apiculture sector, but they also have an influence on other sectors, because pollination by an appropriate number of bee colonies is essential for the production of many arable crops, vegetables and fruits. The decline in the number of pollinating bees could also endanger the pollination of natural vegetation as an ecological service. It is not an exaggeration to fear that the growing tendencies of honey imports may force European beekeepers out of the EU's internal market, and pollination could fail because of the decline in bee populations. This could have a direct effect on plant production in the future, and most importantly, on fruit production and the horticulture sector. Thus, this is a matter of food security and environmental protection also.

Finally, we find it important to support initiatives aiming to strengthen the apiculture sector (e.g. the Slovenian 'European Honey Breakfast Initiative' and the endeavour to designate 20 May as the World Day of Bees).