



**2017/2115(INI)**

25.7.2017

# **DRAFT REPORT**

Prospects and challenges for the EU apiculture sector  
(2017/2115(INI))

Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

Rapporteur: Norbert Erdős

**CONTENTS**

	<b>Page</b>
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION .....	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT .....	9

## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### Prospects and challenges for the EU apiculture sector (2017/2115(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its resolution of 15 November 2011 on honeybee health and the challenges of the beekeeping sector (2011/2108(INI)),
  - having regard to the Conclusions of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council (8606/11 ADD 1 REV 1) concerning the Commission Communication on honeybee health (17608/10),
  - having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and the opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (A8-0000/2017),
- A. whereas the beekeeping sector is an integral part of European agriculture, providing over 500 000 EU citizens with their main income or additional earnings;
- B. whereas the beekeeping sector is hugely significant (around EUR 14.2 annually), as 84% of plant species and 76% of food production are dependent on pollination by bees, which also helps maintain the ecological balance and biological diversity in Europe;
- C. whereas in 2004 the Commission guaranteed EUR 32 million to national beekeeping programmes for the sole benefit of beekeeping, and whereas this had been increased to 36 million by 2006 (representing 3 thousandths of the CAP budget);
- D. whereas during this period the bee population rose by 47.8% but EU funding increased by just 12%, so that the available EU funding is not sufficient to maintain the bee population;
- E. whereas there is a need for beekeepers to operate in harmony with the services which they carry out and to do so responsibly and professionally;
- F. whereas in some Member States the tax laws differentiate between professional and amateur beekeepers, with the latter benefiting from tax relief, although this makes no sense professionally;
- G. whereas some invasive alien species such as *Varroa destructor*, the small hive beetle, the Asian hornet and American foulbrood are causing widespread destruction in the European bee population and causing serious harm to beekeepers;
- H. whereas farmers receive support for protective measures against *Varroa destructor*, which there has so far been no success in eradicating as there are no effective remedies as yet and R&D efforts are very inadequate;
- I. whereas beekeepers, agricultural producers and environmentalists also expect there to

be a clear scientific consensus on all substances and other factors which are a danger to bees' health;

- J. whereas the statistics indicate progress in the EU's beekeeping sector, with an increase in the number of bee colonies and honey production over the past 15 years and an ongoing rise in the number of beekeepers;
- K. whereas this statistical increase results in part from the steady rise in Member State numbers and in part from the particular situation of the sector, since each Member State furnishes data for the period with the highest number of bee colonies in a given year;
- L. whereas beekeepers always produce less honey once the winter is over, because of autumn and winter losses which can be as much as 50% in some Member States;
- M. whereas beekeepers never use as many bee colonies in honey production as the statistics show, since producers restore the original number of colonies in the course of the year, at the expense of production quantities;
- N. whereas the two-fold increase in the amount of honey produced and exported in some countries over the past 15 years whilst the EU is barely 50% self-sufficient in honey – a figure which is not increasing – cannot be explained;
- O. whereas the EU imports 25% of the honey it uses (60% of its annual imports) each year from these countries, which is why Europe's beekeepers are in dire straits;
- P. whereas consumers are aware that no more than one third of the honey they use is produced in the EU;
- Q. whereas since 2001 the amount of honey in the world's major honey-producing regions has stagnated or decreased as a result of the poor health of bees, whilst the amount of honey in China has increased by over 80% (200 000 tonnes);
- R. whereas 100 000 tonnes of imported honey arrives in the EU from China every year – double the amount in 2002 – even though the number of bee colonies has declined in other parts of the world;
- S. whereas honey is the third-most adulterated product in the world and whereas adulteration does considerable harm to Europe's beekeepers and exposes consumers to serious health risks;
- T. whereas according to experts, the 2002 chloramphenicol problem was resolved by companies exporting honey from China not by complying with the rules but by using resin filters;
- U. whereas in December 2015 the Commission ordered the centralised testing of honey;
- V. whereas the honey samples from the Member States were tested by the Joint Research Centre, which found, among other things, that 20% of the samples taken at the EU's external border and at importers' premises were fake honey;
- W. whereas according to the Codex Alimentarius, which is used in the EU, honey is a

natural product to which no substance may be added and from which none may be extracted, and which should not be dried outside the hive;

- X. whereas the imbalance which developed in the European honey market caused the purchase price of honey in the EU's main producing countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Spain, Portugal, France, Croatia and Hungary) to halve by the end of 2016 as compared with the 2014 price, which is putting Europe's beekeepers in a hopeless position;
- Y. whereas the 'Honey Directive' (2001/110/EC) sets out that the country of origin must be indicated but that a simplified indication may be used instead, e.g. 'blend of EC honeys', 'blend of non-EC honeys' or 'blend of EC and non-EC honeys';
- Z. whereas many honey packagers and traders now abuse this way of indicating origin in order to conceal the real country of origin, as purchasers are becoming more knowledgeable and are distrustful of foodstuffs from certain countries;
- AA. whereas the 'European Honey Breakfast' initiative launched by Slovenia was a great success, with Hungary taking part for the first time in 2014;
- AB. whereas, although getting local producers involved in 'honey school' programmes imposes an additional financial burden, the impact on the children's outlook means the costs will be amply repaid in the future;
- AC. whereas annual honey consumption varies hugely across the Member States: whilst Member States in Western Europe have an average consumption of 2.5-2.7 kg per person, the figure for Hungary, for example, is just 0.7 kg;
- AD. whereas the positive physiological impact of honey, particularly in terms of health, means that it should be promoted and its consumption encouraged in all the Member States;
- AE. whereas numerous examples of self-organisation show that the sale of honeys with short supply chains and at local producers' markets is hugely successful, particularly for bio-honey;
- AF. whereas other beekeeping products such as pollen, propolis, beeswax and royal jelly also contribute significantly to people's wellbeing and play an important role in the healthcare and cosmetics industries;

### **The significance of beekeeping**

1. Understands that bees perform a basic agricultural service by pollinating crops, without which European agriculture and in particular plant cultivation would not exist in any form;
2. Understands that beekeeping makes a fundamental contribution to maintaining the ecological balance and biological diversity, so that the sector must be at the heart of the common agricultural policy;
3. Understands that financing of beekeeping must be increased in future agricultural

policy;

### **EU support for beekeeping**

4. Proposes a 47.8% increase in the EU budget for national beekeeping programmes – in line with the actual increase in the bee population – as compared with the 2004 level, which translates as EUR 47 million annually;
5. Calls on the Commission to include a new direct support scheme for beekeepers based on colony numbers in its proposals for the common agricultural policy post-2020;
6. Considers that it would be wise to share beekeeping research topics and the findings which result – particularly where these are financed by the EU – among the Member States in order to avoid duplication;
7. Calls on the Commission to adopt recommendations in order to introduce a uniform, high-quality basic and vocational beekeeping education programme in the EU;
8. Considers that beekeepers should be granted tax relief in every Member State in view of the agricultural and environmental significance of their work;
9. Calls on the Member States to relax the strict road transport rules for beekeepers, particularly by exempting them from tachograph use beyond 100 km, in order to promote bee colony migration;

### **Bee health issues**

10. Understands that some invasive alien species such as the Varroa destructor, the small hive beetle (*Aethina tumida*), the Asian hornet and American foulbrood are causing serious harm to beekeepers and widespread destruction among bees;
11. Calls on the Commission to involve all relevant drug producers in research into bee drugs and to set up a common IT platform to share best solutions and drugs with interested parties;
12. Acknowledges that the results of monitoring exercises to assess the bee health situation carried out by some Member States are important and should be shared with the other Member States and with the Commission;
13. Calls on the Member States and the regions to use all means possible to protect local and regional bee varieties from the undesirable spread of naturalised or invasive alien varieties in the EU;
14. Calls on the European Food Safety Authority to carry out research (laboratory analyses and field experiments), according to a clearly-determined schedule and together with the other EU agencies concerned, into all substances and other factors which endanger bee health;

### **Combating honey counterfeiting effectively**

15. Expects the Member States and the Commission to force honey-producers in non-EU countries who use dishonest methods and EU packagers and traders who wilfully mix adulterated, imported honey with high-quality European honey to comply with EU law;
16. Calls on the Commission to develop effective laboratory analysis procedures (e.g. nuclear magnetic resonance testing) which can be used to detect the increasingly sophisticated adulterations in order to detect instances of honey adulteration;
17. Suggests making honey packaging plants which also process imported honey subject to EU food safety monitoring; this might be achieved by amending Regulation (EC) No 853/2004;
18. This would enable EU monitoring to be applied to honey packagers in non-EU countries, thereby enabling the official auditors to find out if adulterated honey had been used and ensuring its removal from the food chain;
19. Expects honey always to be identifiable from the moment it leaves the hive and to be classifiable according to its plant origin, irrespective of whether it is a domestic or an imported product;
20. Since monofloral honeys are difficult to determine in the Member States, proposes adding a description of their characteristics to the ‘Honey Directive’ (2001/110/EC);
21. Is aware of the practical significance of an early warning system for food and feed and therefore calls on the Commission always to place instances of honey which is clearly fake on the RASFF list;
22. Asks the Commission to put forward a proposal incorporating honey into the scope of Regulation (EC) No 853/2004;
23. Calls on the Commission to ban the distribution of resin-filtered honey as soon as possible, since such honey contains nothing whatsoever of biological value;
24. Calls on the Commission to thoroughly test the large-scale import of honey from China in line with Regulation (EC) No 1036/2016 and particularly to probe the operation of companies exporting honey from China and to evaluate the quality, proportion of quantity and sale price level of the honey on the EU honey market;
25. Calls on the Commission to require official batch-sampling and testing of honey from non-EU countries at the EU’s external borders, in line with Regulation (EC) No 882/2004 (later Regulation (EU) 2017/625);
26. Reminds the Commission that consumers have the right to know the place of origin of all foodstuffs; however, the ‘blend of EC honeys’, ‘blend of non-EC honeys’ and especially ‘blend of EC and non-EC honeys’ labelling completely conceals the origin of the honey from the consumer;
27. Asks that the ‘blend of EC and non-EC honeys’ descriptor be replaced by an indication of exactly which country or countries the honeys used in the final products come from

and that these be listed in the order which corresponds to the proportions used in the final product;

28. Supports the idea of the Member States making it obligatory to indicate the place of origin of the honey on honey and other bee products, as is the case with certain meat and dairy products;

### **Promoting honey as a healthy foodstuff in public education**

29. Acknowledges and welcomes the European Honey Breakfast initiative and calls on the Member States to incorporate the initiative into their basic education systems;
30. Calls on the Commission to put forward a proposal to increase EU support for these programmes by 50% annually to enable the school programmes to operate effectively and local products such as honey, olives and olive oil to be fully included;

### **Encouraging honey consumption and promoting honey**

31. Calls on the Commission to draw up a report on the amount of honey consumed and consumption patterns in the EU;
32. Calls on the Commission to allocate a specific sum from the EU's promotional budget to advertising EU honey in the internal market;
33. Asks the Commission to ensure that the EU declares honey and other bee products to be 'sensitive products' in free trade agreement negotiations;
34. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the national parliaments.

## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The beekeeping sector is an integral part of European agriculture, providing over 500 000 EU citizens with their main income or additional earnings. The importance of the sector is much greater than we might judge from the amount of its contribution to the gross production value of the economy, as 84% of plant species and 76% of Europe's food production depend on pollination by bees, so that the economic value thus produced – estimated at EUR 14.2 billion annually in the EU – exceeds the value of the honey produced by a long way. The significance of honey in maintaining the ecological balance and biological diversity is also plain to see. I think the importance of pollination is insufficiently appreciated and taken for granted in the EU, whereas EUR 2 billion is spent annually in the US on artificial pollination. Beekeeping and beekeepers must therefore be at the heart of the common agricultural policy. Future agricultural policy must raise the profile and financing of beekeeping above its current level.

The situation of beekeepers active in the EU today is far from easy, with many factors making their lives difficult.

1. The biggest problem by far is the spread of fake honey in the internal market, which is responsible for the purchase price of honey falling to half its 2014 value by the end of 2016, primarily in the major honey-producing countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Spain, Portugal, France, Croatia and Hungary. This is putting Europe's beekeepers in a hopeless position. Honey is the third most counterfeited product in the world, meaning that we must fight not only to protect the EU's beekeepers but also for reasons of consumer protection and people's health. Counterfeiting affects almost all the honey imported into the EU and particularly products originating in China. According to the statistics, China produces 450 000 tonnes of honey annually, which is more than the world's largest producers – the EU, Argentina, Mexico, the US and Canada – combined. Experts say that such a quantity simply cannot be the result of beekeeping activity. Pursuant to an initiative formulated at Hungary's request at the December 2015 meeting of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council, the Commission ordered the centralised testing of honey. This was done by the Joint Research Centre, which found, among other things, that 20% of the samples taken at the EU's external border and at importers' premises were fake honey. From a health point of view, it is particularly worrying that, in the view of the experts, China's honey-producers resolved the 2002 chloramphenicol problem not by complying with the rules but by using resin filters; since such 'honey', however, contains nothing whatsoever of biological value, it should be called not honey but a kind of syrup. Some fraudulent honey packagers and traders improve these substances by mixing them with high-quality European honey, applying the 'blend of EU and non-EU honeys' label to the result, as permitted by Directive 2001/110/EC; this is about as informative for consumers as would be a label reading 'honey which does not originate from Mars' – in other words, not at all.

In order satisfactorily to resolve this unsustainable situation, I expect the Member States and the Commission to force honey-producers in non-EU countries who use dishonest methods (primarily certain Chinese producers) and EU packagers and traders who wilfully mix adulterated, imported honey with high-quality European honey to comply with the law; I would particularly recommend developing analytical laboratory methods which can filter out the more sophisticated forgeries (e.g. nuclear magnetic resonance testing), making honey

packaging plants which also process imported honey subject to EU food safety monitoring (853/2004/EC) and ensuring that honey is identifiable from the moment it leaves the hive and to be classifiable according to its plant origin. I would also like to see the characteristics of monofloral honeys to be determined at EU level, honey which is clearly fake to be placed on the RASFF list, resin filtering technology to be banned and honey arriving at the EU's external border from non-EU countries to be officially batch-sampled and the samples to be tested. Crucial to resolving the situation would be for the vague and meaningless 'blend of EC and non-EC honeys' to be replaced by an indication on the label of exactly which country or countries the honeys used in the final products come from and for these to be listed in the order which corresponds to the proportions used in the final product.

2. In addition, a number of animal diseases cause serious problems for beekeepers. Invasive alien species such as the Varroa destructor, the small hive beetle (*Aethina tumida*), the Asian hornet and the American foulbrood are causing widespread destruction to the European bee population and serious harm to beekeepers, a situation which has led to many producers going bankrupt. The Varroa destructor has not yet been overcome, as there are no drugs which will effectively destroy the parasite and research and development in this area is inadequate. In addition, the results of the Member State / regional monitoring tests assessing the health situation of bees conceal a lot of important information from the other Member States, the Commission and the relevant EU agencies, such as the European Food Safety Authority.

I would therefore suggest that the Member States share the results of monitoring tests with each other and with the Commission. As a way of boosting drug research and development, I call on the Commission to involve in the research all relevant drug producers and to set up a common IT platform to share best solutions and drugs with interested parties. Finally, beekeepers, agricultural producers and environmentalists also expect there to be a clear scientific consensus in the EU on all substances and other factors which are a danger to bees' health. I therefore propose that the European Food Safety Authority be asked to carry out research, according to a clearly-determined schedule and together with the other EU agencies concerned (e.g. the European Chemicals Agency), into all substances and other factors which endanger bee health.

3. EU support for beekeepers must also be revised. While the bee population in the EU increased by 47.8% between 2004 and 2016, the budget of the national beekeeping programmes rose by just 12%, from EUR 32 to 36 million a year. This is a grand total of 3 thousandths of the CAP budget! The EU budget for these programme must therefore be increased by 47.8%, which translates as EUR 47 million annually. This can easily be accommodated. Thought should also be given to integrating a new, direct beekeeping subsidy, based on colony numbers, into agricultural policy post-2020. In addition, research and development in beekeeping, education and further training for beekeepers and fiscal policy incentives (e.g. tax exemption for beekeeping activities) would help beekeepers to thrive.

4. Honey should also be promoted among children as a healthy foodstuff in their public education. An excellent example of this is the 'European Honey Breakfast' initiative organised by Slovenia and subsequently introduced by several other Member States; this might usefully be made a feature throughout the EU. School programmes are also a perfect forum for including honey in developing children's outlook. I therefore support increasing the EU budget for school programmes.

5. Promoting honey in the EU is also important, as annual consumption is unsatisfactory: the average of 2.5-2.7 kg per person per year in West European Member States is more or less acceptable, but the figure for Hungary, for example, is just 0.7 kg per year, which is low. The Commission should be called on to draw up a report on the amount of honey consumed and consumption patterns in the EU. I would also encourage the Member States to use every available means, in particular the intensive assistance for short supply chains in rural development programmes, to promote the local and regional sale of honey and particularly bio-honey. Finally, the beekeeping sector deserves particular attention to be paid by the EU to its protection in negotiations on free trade agreements and honey and other bee products to be classified as 'sensitive products'.