

Revision of EU marketing standards for certain 'breakfast' directives

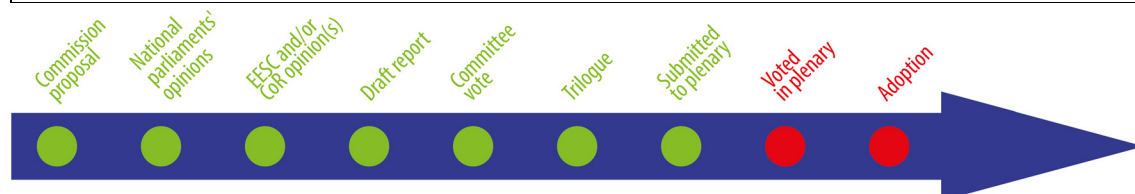
OVERVIEW

Over time, EU food markets have evolved significantly, driven by innovation and changes in consumer demand and expectations. Taking this shift into account, on 21 April 2023 the European Commission proposed to update some of the rules governing a set of directives on food products – the 'breakfast' directives. Changes include introducing stricter origin labelling for honey, increasing the fruit content in jams, reducing sugar in fruit juice and clearing the way for the production of lactose-free evaporated milk.

Following the vote on the report by the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), Parliament adopted its position on the proposal with 522 votes in favour, 13 against and 65 abstentions on 12 December 2023. Strengthening the Commission's text, the plenary approved measures to protect consumers and beekeepers from adulterated honey, and to facilitate informed consumer choices through increased transparency. On 30 January 2024, Parliament and Council reached a provisional agreement, which was endorsed by ENVI on 14 February 2024. The text has now to be approved formally by Parliament and the Council. The new legislation will enter into force 20 days after its formal adoption.

Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and the Council amending Council Directives 2001/110/EC relating to honey, 2001/112/EC relating to fruit juices and certain similar products intended for human consumption, 2001/113/EC relating to fruit jams, jellies and marmalades and sweetened chestnut purée intended for human consumption, and 2001/114/EC relating to certain partly or wholly dehydrated preserved milk for human consumption

<i>Committee responsible:</i>	Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI)	COM(2023) 0201 21.4.2023
<i>Rapporteur:</i>	Alexander Bernhuber (EPP, Austria)	2023/0105(COD)
<i>Shadow rapporteurs:</i>	Günther Sidl (S&D, Austria) Pascal Canfin (Renew, France) Manuela Ripa (Greens/EFA, Germany) Alexandr Vondra (ECR, Czechia) Gianna Gancia (ID, Italy) Anja Hazekamp (GUE, Netherlands)	Ordinary legislative procedure (COD) (Parliament and Council on equal footing – formerly 'co-decision')
<i>Next steps expected:</i>	Plenary vote on provisional agreement	



Introduction

First introduced in the early days of the common agricultural policy, the European Union (EU) marketing standards are based on the so-called [common market organisations](#) (CMOs)¹. This set of rules was designed to help facilitate the functioning of the internal market, keep food of unsatisfactory quality off the market, provide relevant information to consumers and ensure a level playing field for competing products. Up until 2007, when a single CMO was created, there had been 21 CMOs, each with its own rules.

A group of marketing standards on good products, established by a set of seven directives commonly known as the 'breakfast' directives,² are over 20 years old and predate the CMO Regulation. They were introduced to iron out the differences between the EU Member States' national laws that risked leading to unfair competition, misleading consumers and ultimately hampering the functioning of the internal market. These seven directives³ lay down common rules on the composition, sale name, labelling and presentation of certain food products in order to protect the interests of consumers and ensure the free movement of these products in the EU.

Over the past decade, food markets have evolved substantially, driven by innovation and changes in consumer demand and expectations. Taking into account these evolutions, on 21 April 2023, the European Commission proposed to update some of the rules governing the 'breakfast directives'.

The revision also echoes key messages in the [EU's 'farm to fork' strategy](#), which addresses the challenges facing sustainable food systems and recognises the strong links between 'healthy people, healthy societies and a healthy planet'. In particular, the strategy envisages a revision of the marketing standards to facilitate the uptake and supply of sustainable products. It also seeks ways to [facilitate](#) the adoption of healthy diets and to encourage product reformulation, particularly for foods high in fat, sugar⁴ and/or salt, as per the World Health Organization (WHO) [recommendations](#).⁵ Lastly, the strategy proposes to extend the [mandatory indication of origin](#) of food products.

The revision of the directives is also carried out against the backdrop of the [United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals](#), in particular [Goal 12](#), which supports sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Existing situation

General framework for marketing standards

The existing EU marketing standards are set out in three main bodies of legislation:

- The Common Market Organisation established by Regulation [\(EU\) No 1308/2013](#). Agricultural products covered by this regulation include cereals, rice, sugar, seed, olive oils and table olives, fruits and vegetables, wine, tobacco and milk.
- A number of regulations – also known as 'secondary CMO legislation' - setting specific marketing standards for various agricultural products such as olive oil, fresh and processed fruits and vegetables, eggs, meat and milk and milk products.
- The 'breakfast' directives setting rules on the description, definition, characteristics and labelling of: cocoa and chocolate products, sugars for human consumption, honey, fruit juices, dehydrated milk, coffee and chicory extracts, fruit jams, jellies, marmalades and sweetened chestnut purée intended for human consumption.

Food information to consumers

The seven directives apply without prejudice to the general rules on the labelling of food products laid down in Regulation (EU) No [1169/2011](#), the EU's main [food-labelling act](#), applicable in all EU countries. It sets certain basic requirements for information that must be given to consumers, such as a mandatory list of ingredients, net quantity, a use-by date and presence of allergens (e.g. soy, nuts, gluten, lactose), which must be emphasised by the use of a special font, style or background colour in the list of ingredients. The obligation to provide nutrition information applies since 13 December 2016.

Overview of the 'breakfast' directives

Honey

Out of the seven 'breakfast' directives, the one that has provoked by far the most attention and reactions over time is the Honey Directive (see also Figure 1 below).

Apart from establishing rules on the composition of honey and defining it as 'a **natural sweet substance produced by *Apis mellifera* bees from the nectar of plants or from secretions of living parts of plants or excretions of plant-sucking insects on plants**', [Directive 2001/110/EC](#) specifies the types of honey products that can be sold under given names, as well as providing rules on labelling, presentation and information on origin. Importantly, the directive also clarifies the **labelling requirements for honey originating in more than one EU country or a non-EU country**. In these cases, the indication of the country of origin may be replaced by one of the following phrases: 'blend of EU honeys'; 'blend of non-EU honeys'; or 'blend of EU and non-EU honeys'.

Information on regional, territorial or topographical origin, on floral or vegetable origin or on specific quality criteria may complement this labelling (except for 'filtered honey'⁶ and 'baker's honey'⁷).

Honey labelling issues

In a [written question](#) to the Commission, Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Clara Aguilera (S&D, Spain) laments that the provisions of Directive 2001/110/EC, which require the indication of different blends where honey does not originate from a single EU or third country, are diluted by the application of the [Union Customs Code](#). According to the latter, goods whose production involves more than one country are deemed to originate in the country or territory where they underwent their 'last, substantial, ... justified processing'. Secondary legislation lists what is not deemed 'substantial ... justified processing', in which blending or heating is omitted.

While confirming in his [answer](#) that 'the country of origin of "natural honey" is the country where it is "wholly obtained" or where it underwent its "last substantial transformation" ', Commissioner Paolo Gentiloni explains that according to a non-binding [guidance](#), the country of 'substantial transformation' of honey is 'the country where the honey is obtained in its natural or unprocessed state'. He further indicates that based on a request from the agricultural sector, the Commission may consider revising the part of that guidance, which however will not affect the labelling of honey currently governed by Council Directive 2001/110/EC.

Fruit juices

[Directive 2001/112/EC](#) established a set of marketing standards for fruit juices as regards: product names, definitions of products and characteristics; authorised ingredients, treatments and substances; definitions of raw materials; labelling; **special provisions relating to fruit nectars** (minimum juice and/or purée content).

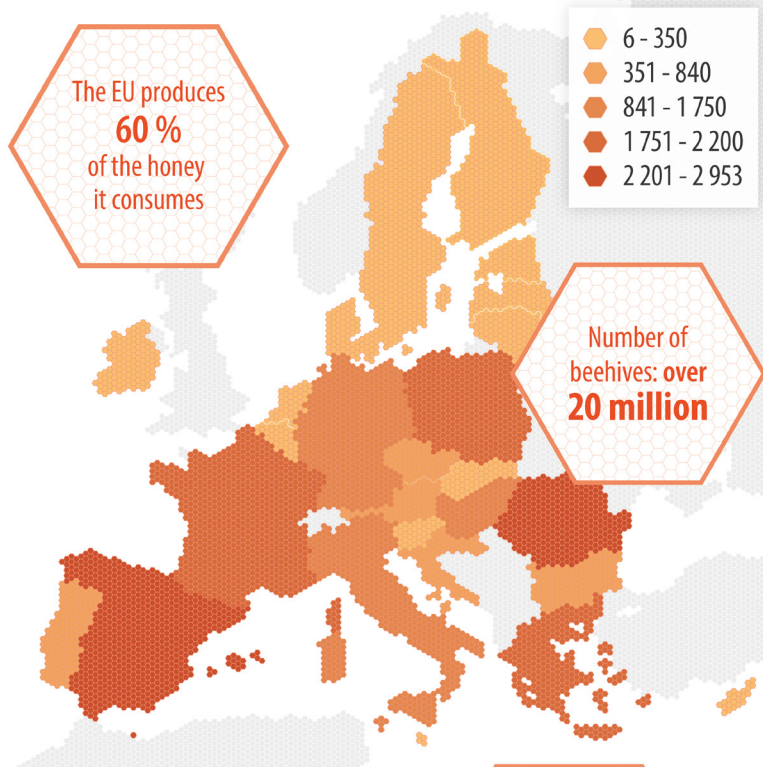
Fruit juices are labelled in accordance with the general rules laid down in Regulation (EU) No [1169/2011](#) on the labelling of food products. Additional specific rules laid out in Directive 2001/112/EC seek to improve consumer information. They require that the name of a product contain a clear indication of whether the product is a mixture of different fruits and whether it has been obtained entirely or partly from a concentrate.

[Directive 2012/12/EU](#) **put an end to the practice of adding sugars in fruit juices**. Up until that moment, the absence of added sugars in fruit juices had been commonly denoted by means of the nutrition claim 'with no added sugars'. The use of this claim was disallowed after the end of a transitional period of 18 months.

Figure 1 – Honey, beehives and beekeepers in the EU

Honey, beehives and beekeepers in the EU

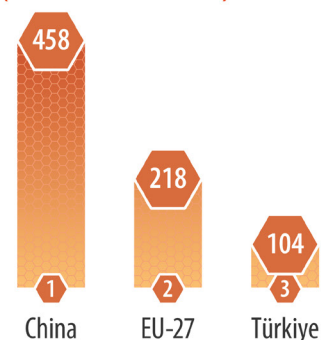
Number of beehives in 2021 (in thousands)



Number of beekeepers in 2022



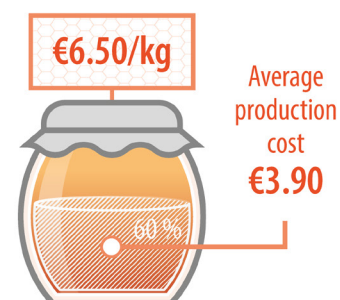
World's top 3 honey producers in 2020 (in thousand tonnes)



Beehive yield



Average price of multi-floral honey (2017-2018)



Data source: European Commission, [Honey market presentation](#) and [EU beekeeping sector](#), 2022.

Sugar content in fruit juices

Consumers are not always aware that fruit juices are [high in free sugars](#) (often equivalent to the sugar content in fizzy beverages). Fruit juices and fruit juice concentrates are classified as 'free sugars' according to both the [WHO](#) and the [European Food Safety Authority](#) (EFSA).

As highlighted by an EFSA's [scientific opinion](#) on the tolerable upper intake level for dietary sugars, the contribution of fruit juices to the intake of free sugars can be significant, going up to 50 % for some consumers. To reduce the risk of overweight, obesity and tooth decay, the World Health Organization recommends limiting daily intake of free sugars to less than 10 % (ideally below 5 %) of a person's energy intake.

The EFSA takes a similar stand as regards added sugars, recommending that their intake should be 'as low as possible'. While the EFSA underlines that it is impossible to set a science-based tolerable upper intake level for [sugars](#), experts confirm the link, to various degrees of certainty, between sugars and a range of health issues such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, high bad cholesterol, liver disease and hypertension.

Dehydrated milk

[Directive 2001/114/EC](#) established a set of marketing standards for partly or wholly dehydrated preserved milk, as regards the definitions of products and product names, in particular the designations of certain products and their labelling. Preserved milk is defined based on its composition and the preparation processes it undergoes, with the aim of promoting a correct and non-misleading commercial use of these specific designations.

Fruit jams, jellies, marmalades and sweetened chestnut purée

[Council Directive 2001/113/EC](#) covers, among others, names, product descriptions and definitions; allowed additional ingredients; definitions of raw materials; allowed treatments and labelling. The product name includes an **indication of the fruit or fruits used**, in descending order of weight. However, for products manufactured from three or more fruits, the indication of the fruits used may be replaced by the phrase 'mixed fruit' or similar wording, or by enumerating the fruits used. In addition, the labelling of jams, jellies, marmalades and sweetened chestnut purée must include the following:

- **fruit content** per 100 g of product;
- **total sugar content** if no nutrition claim is made for sugars on the labelling in accordance with [Directive 90/496/EEC](#);
- residual content of sulphur dioxide, where it is more than 10 mg/kg.

Annex II to Directive establishes a **list of authorised additives** such as honey, sugar, fruit juice and certain spirits.

Cocoa and chocolate products

[Directive 2000/36/EC](#) harmonises the labelling of cocoa and chocolate products, and establishes definitions for these products to enable consumers to make informed choices.

Coffee and chicory extracts

[Directive 1999/4/EC](#) covers – among others – product descriptions, definitions and characteristics, as well as labelling. The products must comply with certain minimum composition requirements, in particular as regards the dry matter content.

Sugars intended for human consumption

[Directive 2001/111/EC](#) regulates – among others – definitions of products according to quality standards, derogations from quality standards, packaging and labelling. It defines **11 sugar varieties** with corresponding compositional characteristics and rules relating to packaging and labelling.

Parliament's starting position

In its October 2021 [resolution](#) on a 'farm to fork' strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system, Parliament called for a comprehensive and complementary range of measures, including regulatory measures and consumer awareness campaigns to reduce the burden placed on public health by the overconsumption of highly processed foods as well as of other products with high salt, sugar and fat content.

MEPs urged the major food producers and retailers to swiftly reformulate those processed foods not covered by EU quality schemes where improvements towards a healthier composition can be achieved, and welcomed the Commission's bid to incentivise this process, including by setting maximum levels of sugar, fats and salt in certain processed foods.

Importantly, while stressing that all country-of-origin labelling needs to be effectively enforced to combat food fraud, Parliament insisted on the need for legislative changes to the honey-labelling rules to improve consumer information and support the EU beekeeping sector by reinforcing import inspections in order to prevent imports of adulterated honey.

A group of MEPs back a revision of the Honey Directive

In February 2023, 45 MEPs from various political groups and nationalities [called for a revision](#) of the Honey Directive 2001/110/EC to reassure consumers, combat fraud and adulteration, and limit the unfair competition faced by EU beekeepers. In a written question to the Commissioner for Agriculture, Janusz Wojciechowski, the MEPs asked that honey imported from third countries be labelled 'to indicate each country of origin, in descending order, and its respective share of honey', to guide consumers in their choices and improve the added value of EU honeys on the market. Similarly, the MEPs urged the Commissioner to defend the current definition of honey at the International Organization for Standardization in response to China's efforts 'to impose a definition that would allow it to export low-cost products under the name of "honey", to the detriment of quality and consumer confidence in EU products'.

Council starting position

Even though the Agriculture and Fisheries Council of [December 2020](#) could not reach a consensus, the presidency draft conclusions on front-of-pack nutrition labelling, nutrient profiles and origin labelling referred to the Member States' calls to revise the Honey Directive to specify the countries of origin of the honey used in honey blends. Similarly, EU countries urged the Commission to start work on a legislative proposal to amend the directive accordingly.

More recently, ahead of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council of [January 2023](#), the Slovenian Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, Irena Šinko – supported by her counterparts from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain – presented a non-paper urging the Commission 'to be ambitious' in reinforcing the rules on the labelling of honey and in particular the origin of honey blends imported from third countries.

Similarly, ahead of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council of [April 2023](#), the same group of Member States reiterated their demand for honey labelling to not only list all countries of origin in a blend but also the final composition by individual countries, expressed as a percentage, given that some 80 % of honey sold in retail is in the form of blends. During the Council debate, several ministers stressed that labelling alone would not be enough to prevent unfair competition from overseas producers and urged the Commission to develop analytical methods to test honey and prevent fraud.

Even though 20 out of 27 Member States support the introduction of mandatory labels to indicate each country of origin in blends with its share of honey in the mix, some EU countries, among them **Denmark, Finland, Germany** and the **Netherlands**, drew attention to the administrative burden of accurate labelling of blends of imported honeys and the cost to the food chain.

Preparation of the proposal

The [impact assessment](#) accompanying the Commission proposal received a [positive opinion](#) with reservations from the Regulatory Scrutiny Board on 21 September 2022. It was supported by internal and external technical expertise. As part of its preparation for the revision, the Commission published an external evaluation support [study](#) on marketing standards and a staff working document on the [evaluation](#) of marketing standards.

Building on the study, the evaluation identified some limitations preventing EU marketing standards from keeping up with changes in technology, marketing strategies and consumer preferences. That was the case for fruit juices in particular, where the evaluation identified a labelling issue. Directive 2012/12/EU disallowed the addition of sugars to fruit juices and, after 28 October 2016, the use of the wording 'from 28 April 2015 no fruit juices contain added sugars' for fruit juices. Conversely, manufacturers of other fruit-based beverages, including nectars, could continue to use the wording 'with no added sugars' and 'contains only naturally occurring sugars'. This created confusion among consumers and resulted in unfair competition.

The impact assessment was also informed by stakeholder consultation activities, including a collection of [feedback](#) on the inception impact assessment (19 January – 16 February 2021, 156 replies); an open [public consultation](#) (8 June – 31 August 2021, 331 replies) and targeted stakeholder surveys and interviews. The Commission also held a [technical workshop](#) with selected experts from the food supply chain, consumer groups, NGOs and academia, in collaboration with the Joint Research Centre on 9 September 2021 and took note of EU countries' opinions in a targeted consultation from 17 September to 14 October 2021.

The changes the proposal would bring

The proposed [directive](#), to be transposed into national legislation within 18 months of its entry into force, amends four of the seven 'breakfast' directives.

Honey

To enhance consumers' informed choices, including with regard to the origin of their food, the proposal revises the rules for labelling the origin of honey and **introduces the requirement to list all of the countries from where the honey originates on the packaging**. This requirement would not apply to single portions of honey (breakfast packs), in view of their small size and the technical difficulties involved when the honey comes from several countries.

Fruit juices

Given the growing awareness of the health concerns linked to the consumption of sugar, the Commission considers that it would be appropriate to reintroduce, without a time limitation, the possibility for the industry to use the statement indicating that **fruit juices do not contain added sugars**. Fruit juices could also feature the wording '**with no added sugars**' to make it clear that, contrary to fruit nectars, fruit juices cannot by definition contain added sugars – something that most consumers are not aware of.

Moreover, to address consumers' growing demand for products with lower sugar content, a reformulated fruit juice could feature the wording '**reduced-sugar fruit juice**' on its label. As regards reduced-sugar fruit juices, the approach taken is to create a new category of products and to set the bar for sugar reduction at the same level as the one laid down in [Regulation \(EC\) No 1924/2006](#) on nutrition claims for sugar reduction claims (a minimum of 30 %). This would help avoid confusion among consumers, despite the fact that for this new category of products, 'reduced-sugar' would not be a nutrition claim but part of the product name *per se*.

To support the production and marketing of fruits and to improve the minimum quality of nectars, the proposal would lower the proportion of sugars and/or honey that may be added to fruit nectars, which are naturally low in acidity and palatable as they are. It is also considered appropriate to add proteins from sunflower seeds to the list of authorised treatments and substances. To simplify matters further and adjust to consumer tastes, the term 'coconut water' could be used in the future alongside 'coconut juice'.

Jams and marmalades

The proposal would **increase the general minimum fruit content to 450 g/kg** (as opposed to the current 350 g/kg) – reserved at present for 'extra jam' and 'extra jelly' – and **from 450 g/kg to 550 g/kg for 'extra jam' and 'extra jelly'**. This would reduce the amount of added sugar needed to reach the minimum content of soluble dry matter in these products.

The term '**marmalade**', authorised until now only for citrus jams, would from now on be allowed for all jams. Doing so would make it possible to adjust the name of the product to the ones most used locally. To avoid confusion among consumers, the term 'citrus marmalade' would have to be used throughout the EU to designate the product previously defined as 'marmalade'. This would help to distinguish the two product categories and to be in line with the international standard reflected in the Codex General Standard for jams, jellies and marmalades, ([Codex Stan 296-2009](#)), adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

Dehydrated milk

To respond to evolving consumers' needs, a treatment to produce **lactose-free dehydrated milk products** would be authorised. Furthermore, the proposed changes would consist in removing the distinction between evaporated and condensed milk (in English) in Annex II to the directive, in line with the international standards defined in the Codex Standard for evaporated milks ([Codex Stan 281-1971](#)).

Advisory committees

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) appointed [Kerli Ats](#) (Civil Society Organisations – Group III, Estonia) as rapporteur. The EESC [opinion](#), adopted on 20 September 2023, supports stricter origin labelling of honey, where the label would state the respective percentage share of each honey contained in the blend in descending order. However, the rapporteur regrets the absence in the proposal of more ambitious measures to combat fraud and emphasises the need for prompt action to find a reliable and accessible analytical method for detecting adulterated honey. In addition, the rapporteur requests that the statement 'no fruit juices contain added sugars', to be placed on fruit juice labels, should be evaluated for its potential to encourage the consumption of juice to the detriment of fresh fruits. Similarly, she proposes that nectar producers be required to include the statement "contains added sugars" and that the statement "with no added sugars" on fruit juice labels be gradually phased out. Finally, while supporting the increase of fruit content in standard jams to 400 g/kg, the rapporteur considers that an increase of this content in extra jams above the current 450 g/kg will not result in a final product with less sugar.

The European Committee of the Regions decided not to issue an opinion.

National parliaments

No reasoned opinion on the grounds of subsidiarity was submitted within the given [deadline](#).

Stakeholder views⁸

The deadline for [feedback](#) on the proposal following its adoption was 16 June 2023. Of the 75 contributions received, 35 % were by citizens, 20 % by business associations and 19 % by companies. The bulk of contributions – 48 % – came from France.

BEUC – the European Consumer Organisation – does not believe that fruit juice producers should be allowed to use the claim 'fruit juices do not contain added sugar' on the label. BEUC is concerned that the claim, while technically accurate, would mislead consumers, as it would create 'a positive impression of the healthiness of a fruit juice, without providing a full picture of the often-high content of sugar in the fruit juice'. As regards honey labelling, while BEUC welcomes the mandatory indication of all individual countries of origin, it calls for indicating the percentage of the individual honeys in a honey blend, arguing that consumers should know whether 'a blend of German and Chinese honey contains only 2 % German and 98 % Chinese honey'. Finally, BEUC hails the increased minimum fruit content in jams, which will offer consumers a product with fewer free sugars and more fruit.

COPA-COGECA – a leading organisation representing farmer interests, welcomes the proposal's objective to adapt outdated rules in order to reflect market and societal changes. On honey labelling, the farmer organisation proposes three measures: the introducing a mandatory country of origin labelling of honey blends with an indication of the respective percentage share of each honey origin displayed in descending order; enhancing the traceability in the honey chain; and laboratory testing of honey. These measures would be accompanied by the creation of a community reference centre for honey and an updating of the list of laboratory methods used for detecting fraud. Furthermore, systematic testing and traceability checks of honey imported into the EU should be introduced in order to fight adulteration.

On fruit juices, COPA-COGECA objects to the creation of a new category bearing the label of 'reduced-sugar fruit juice', for fear that natural fruit juices will be further 'demonised' as less healthy because of their naturally occurring sugars. In addition, it proposes to distinguish between reduced sugars and honey in fruit nectars, and pleads for the introduction of a specific denomination – 'blood orange' – to avoid providing misleading information to consumers.

PROFEL – the **European Association of Fruit and Vegetables Processors** – argues that raising the fruit content in jams would make no difference, as the final sugar level would stay the same. In addition, as fruits contain up to 90 % of water, greater water evaporation would require longer cooking times, leading to deterioration of colour, flavour and texture and increased energy consumption, thus undermining decarbonisation efforts. Similarly, jam producers highlight that increasing the fruit content in standard jams and in extra jams by 29 % and 22 %, respectively, as proposed, would make products even more expensive due to longer processing times and higher energy costs, in a context where all fruit processors are facing disruptions in the supply chain of fruits due to climate change. This is expected to ultimately entail an increase in imports from third countries.

Highlighting the fact that 20 EU countries and 45 MEPs supported the introduction of more detailed honey labelling obligations, **FNSEA** – the **French National Federation of Agricultural Holders' Unions** – expresses its disappointment with the lack of ambition in the Commission proposal and calls for indicating each country of origin, in descending order, and its respective share of honey (as a percentage). In addition, the FNSEA requests an update of the list of analytical methods of fraud detection, which are too obsolete compared to the latest honey adulteration techniques.

Along the same lines, the **European Professional Beekeepers Association** insists that all European consumers should be able to benefit from detailed honey labelling, already introduced in Italy (2006), Greece (2015), Croatia (2017), Romania, Spain and France (2022). A second proposal emanating from the association concerns fraud detection and the need to speed up work on standardisation of analytical methods.

According to the **Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Agricultores y Ganaderos** – a major farmer organisation in Spain – the confusion regarding honey origin is further aggravated by the application of the Union Customs Code. Additional criticism concerns the fact that the proposal does not categorise filtered honey or honey heated above 50°C as honey for industrial use, even though both treatments result in a honey that does not comply with the product definition in Annexes I and II of the Honey Directive.

Legislative process

In the **European Parliament**, the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) adopted the [report](#) drawn up by Alexander Bernhuber (EPP, Austria) on 29 November 2023, with 73 votes in favour, 2 against and 10 abstentions.

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI) endorsed its [opinion](#) on 16 November 2023.

On 12 December 2023, Parliament largely backed the [position](#) expressed by the ENVI committee and adopted its negotiating [position](#) with 522 votes in favour, 13 against and 65 abstentions.

In their first-reading vote, MEPs agreed that the country where honey has been harvested must appear on the front-of-pack label close to the product brand name. Parliament also suggested that producers either give the exact percentage share or use the ranges: > 90 %, 70 %-90 %, 50 %-70 %, 30 %-50 %, 10 %-30 % and < 10 %. If the honey originates in more than one country, MEPs insisted that the countries of origin be indicated on the label in descending order, according to the proportion they make up of the final product.

Given the limited space on smaller packs, MEPs suggested using the international ISO country codes rather than the full names of the countries of origin (for example, AT for Austria). The different requirements for small packs and those containing over 30 g would replace the exemption from labelling envisaged by the Commission for single-portion breakfast packs of honey blends under 25 g on grounds of 'technical difficulties'. Parliament also proposed fewer percentage ranges (> 75 %, 50 %-75 %, 25 %-50 % or < 25 %) for these packs.

To limit fraud, MEPs called for the introduction of a traceability system for the honey supply chain to track product origin, with an exemption for beekeepers with fewer than 150 hives. They also urged the EU to form a reference laboratory for honey to improve controls and to detect adulteration through systematic testing.

For fruit juices, jams, jellies, marmalades and sweetened chestnut purée, MEPs insisted that the country of origin of the fruit(s) used be indicated on the front label.

MEPs would allow placing the 'contains only naturally occurring sugars' label on fruit juices. To meet the growing demand for low-sugar products, reformulated fruit juices could be labelled as 'reduced-sugar fruit juice'. However, new techniques that remove naturally occurring sugars in fruit juices, jams, jellies or milk should not lead to the use of sweeteners to compensate for the effect that sugar reduction has on the taste, texture and quality of the final product. Moreover, products in which such techniques have been used should not have labels containing claims about their beneficial health effects.

The **Council** adopted its [negotiating mandate](#) on 4 December 2023. For honey labels, it envisaged that the countries of origin would be shown on the label in descending order, based on weight, with the percentage represented by each country in the final blend. EU countries could decide that the obligation to indicate the percentage on the label only applies to the four largest parts, provided they represent more than 50 % of the weight of the mixture. On packs of less than 30 g, the names of the countries of origin could be replaced by two-letter ISO codes.

Responding to demand for reduced sugar products, the Council supported the introduction of three new categories of fruit juice: 'reduced-sugar fruit juice', 'reduced-sugar fruit juice from concentrate' and 'concentrated reduced-sugar fruit juice'.

The minimum fruit content would be increased to 500 g/kg for extra jams and 450 g/kg for jams. Technological processes applied for the production of lactose-free dehydrated milk would be allowed.

The positions of [Parliament](#) and [Council](#) being relatively close, a single trilogue meeting on 30 January 2024 allowed them to reach a [provisional political agreement](#).

The [compromise text](#) endorsed by ENVI on 14 February with 76 votes in favour, none against and no abstentions, makes it compulsory to clearly indicate, close to the product name, the countries of **origin of the honey**, 'in descending order of their share in weight, together with the percentage that each one represents'. However, EU countries would have the flexibility to enforce this obligation for the four largest shares only when they account for more than 50 % of the blend. Should this not be the case, the percentages for all countries of origin would have to be indicated. To ensure flexibility, packs under 30 g could indicate the names of the countries of origin by their international two-letter ISO codes, as per Parliament's proposal (the Commission had requested this measure for packs under 25 g).

However, MEPs had to make a concession on **traceability**. Parliament would have preferred that every producer had a unique identification code so that all batches could be traced back to the harvesting producer or importer. Instead, the Commission will need to conduct feasibility studies before proposing harmonised methods of analysis to detect honey adulteration with sugar, a uniform methodology to trace the origin of honey and criteria to ensure that honey is not overheated when sold to consumers. Parliament was successful in its demand for the establishment of an EU platform of experts to collect data, improve controls, detect adulteration in honey and make recommendations for the future EU traceability system.

MEPs were unable to convince the Council to agree to **origin labelling for products other than honey** – that is, the fruit in juice, jams and marmalades, as well as the sugar in jams and marmalades. EU countries expressed concerns about the potential administrative burden this may impose on food companies and the additional costs it could create for consumers, especially because there has been no impact assessment conducted on these issues. Instead, the Commission will have to prepare a report within 36 months of the entry into force of the directive – that is, around spring 2027 – assessing the feasibility of introducing a rule making it compulsory to label the country of origin of the fruit used. If appropriate, this report would be accompanied by a legislative proposal.

To meet the growing demand for reduced-sugar products, the compromise text introduces three new categories of **fruit juices**: 'reduced-sugar fruit juice', 'reduced-sugar fruit juice from concentrate' and 'concentrated reduced-sugar fruit juice'. Reformulated fruit juices can be labelled as 'reduced sugar fruit juice' if at least 30 % of the natural sugars have been removed. However, producers cannot use sweeteners to compensate for the effect of the reduction in sugar on the taste, texture and quality of the final product. The text includes Parliament's demand that the text 'fruit juices contain only naturally occurring sugars' be included on fruit juice labels.

The co-legislators also agreed to increase the **minimum fruit content in jams** – from 350 g/kg to 450 g/kg – and in extra-jams – from 450 g/kg to 500 g/kg – in order to enhance the quality and reduce the sugar content of these products. EU countries will now have the option to use the term 'marmalade' interchangeably with 'jam', to accommodate local terminology. Previously, the term 'marmalade' was only authorised for citrus jams.

Regarding **dehydrated milk**, the co-legislators included provisions in the text to permit the use of technological processes to produce lactose-free dehydrated milk products. Additionally, the distinction between 'evaporated' and 'condensed' milk will be eliminated, aligning the new legislation with the *Codex Alimentarius* standard.

The text must now be adopted formally by the Council and by Parliament. The vote in plenary is scheduled for the April I session. Once formally approved, the new legislation will be published in the EU Official Journal and will enter into force 20 days later. EU countries will have to apply the new rules within two years of the legislation's entry into force.

SOURCE

[Foodstuffs for human consumption: amending certain 'Breakfast' Directives](#), Legislative Observatory (OEIL), European Parliament.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ [Regulation \(EU\) No 1308/2013](#) on the common organisation of the markets in agricultural products includes a specific section on marketing standards (Part II, Title II, Chapter I, Section 1). It provides for marketing standards (Subsection 2, Article 75), definitions, designations and sales descriptions (Subsection 2, Article 78) and optional reserved terms (Subsection 3).
- ² So defined because they mainly cover agricultural and food products usually consumed for breakfast.
- ³ [Directive 2000/36/EC](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 June 2000 relating to cocoa and chocolate products intended for human consumption;
[Council Directive 2001/111/EC](#) of 20 December 2001 relating to certain sugars intended for human consumption;
[Council Directive 2001/110/EC](#) of 20 December 2001 relating to honey;
[Council Directive 2001/112/EC](#) of 20 December 2001 relating to fruit juices and certain similar products intended for human consumption;
[Council Directive 2001/114/EC](#) of 20 December 2001 relating to certain partly or wholly dehydrated preserved milk for human consumption;
[Directive 1999/4/EC](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 February 1999 relating to coffee extracts and chicory extracts;
[Council Directive 2001/113/EC](#) of 20 December 2001 relating to fruit jams, jellies, marmalades and sweetened chestnut purée intended for human consumption.
- ⁴ This includes reducing the intake of free sugars in diets, as demonstrated in an EFSA scientific opinion on the [tolerable upper intake level for dietary sugars](#). Free sugars comprise added sugars as well as sugars naturally occurring in fruit juice and concentrated fruit juice, whose structure has been broken down. Jellies are made from fruit juice and sugar.
- ⁵ For a healthy diet, the WHO recommends limiting the intake of free sugars to less than 10 % of total energy intake. A further reduction to less than 5 % of total energy intake is suggested for additional health benefits.
- ⁶ Honey obtained by removing foreign inorganic or organic matter in such a way as to result in the significant removal of pollen.
- ⁷ The words 'intended for cooking only' must appear on the label in close proximity to the product name.
- ⁸ This section aims to provide a flavour of the debate and is not intended to be an exhaustive account of all different views on the proposal.

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eprs@ep.europa.eu (contact)

www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu (intranet)

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