

Prospects and challenges for the EU apiculture sector

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The European Parliament adopted by 560 votes to 27, with 28 abstentions, a resolution on the prospects and challenges for the EU apiculture sector.

Members stated that the beekeeping sector is vital for the EU and contributes significantly to society, both economically with around EUR 14.2 billion per year, and environmentally by maintaining the ecological balance and biological diversity, as 84 % of plant species and 76 % of food production in Europe are dependent on pollination by wild and domestic bees.

The Commission is urged to ensure the prominence of beekeeping in future agricultural policy proposals, in terms of support and simplification, research and innovation, and beekeeping education programmes.

EU support to beekeepers: Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to provide support for the EU apiculture sector via strong policy tools and appropriate funding measures corresponding to the current bee stock. It proposed, therefore, a 50 % increase in the EU budget line earmarked for national beekeeping programmes.

Members called on the Commission to launch a study on the feasibility of a beekeeping risk management scheme as part of national beekeeping programmes, in order to deal with loss of production suffered by professional beekeepers. They suggested an allowance calculated in accordance with the average turnover of the businesses affected.

Research, training and education: Parliament called on the Commission to promote and boost European beekeeping research projects and suggested broadening and sharing beekeeping research topics and findings. It called for the setting-up of a common digital database, harmonised at EU level, for the exchange of information among beekeepers, researchers and all parties involved.

Members suggested that greater private and public investment in technical and scientific know-how is essential and should be incentivised, at national and EU level, in particular on genetic and veterinary aspects and the development of innovative bee health medicines. They also called on the Member States to ensure appropriate basic and vocational training programmes for beekeepers.

Bee health and environmental aspects: the resolution highlighted the need for the EU to take the necessary and immediate steps to implement a long-term and large-scale strategy for bee health and repopulation in order to preserve the declining wild bee stock in the EU.

The Commission is invited to:

- provide the necessary incentives to encourage locally-developed practices, in order to preserve honey bee ecotypes and cultivation throughout the EU;
- draw up an inventory to evaluate the existing and emerging health risks at EU and international level, with the aim of establishing an action plan to combat bee mortality;
- progress in implementing the pilot projects on bees and other pollinators as indicators of environmental and habitat health;
- ensure that farm subsidies from the various CAP budget lines take account of bee-friendly practices;
- support EU-wide applied research through effective breeding programmes producing bee species resilient to invasive species and diseases;
- put in place measures to increase legal protection and financial support for local honey bee ecotypes and populations throughout the EU;
- involve all relevant drug producers in research into bee drugs, inter alia in order to combat *Varroa destructor* and set up a common IT platform in order to share best solutions and drugs with interested parties.

Chemicals harmful to bees: Parliament asked the Commission to suspend the authorisation of those pesticide active substances which endanger bee health on the basis of EFSA's scientific findings based on field tests, until the publication of EFSA's final detailed impact assessment. Scientific research, according to a clearly defined schedule, on all substances likely to endanger the health of bees should be intensified.

Combating honey adulteration: Members insisted that full compliance of honey and other bee products with EU quality standards is guaranteed. Honey should always be identifiable along the food chain and classified according to its plant origin, whether it is a domestic or an imported product. The Commission shall develop effective laboratory testing procedures and stronger penalties shall be imposed on offenders.

Members called for the tightening-up of the traceability requirement for honey and called on the Commission amend the Honey Directive ([2001/110/EC](#)) with a view to provide clear definitions and setting out the main distinctive characteristics of all apiculture products.

Promoting bee products and therapeutic use of honey: while welcoming the European Honey Breakfast initiative, Parliament encouraged the Member States to inform children about honey.

Honey is one of the agricultural products that could be included in the School fruit, vegetables and milk scheme. Members encouraged the Member States to boost the participation of local honey producers in the relevant school programmes. They also called on the Commission to put forward a proposal to increase annual EU support for these programmes by 50 %.

The Commission is called on to:

- draw up a report on the amount of honey consumed and consumption patterns in all Member States, and also another report on the various therapeutic practices employing honey, pollen, royal jelly and bee venom in the EU;
- consider the voluntary introduction of the brand Honey from EU, designating honey originating 100 % and exclusively in the EU Member States;
- allocate a specific sum from the EU's promotional budget for advertising EU honey products for consumption and medical purposes;

- ensure that honey and other bee products are considered as sensitive products in ongoing or future negotiations for free trade agreements, since direct competition may expose the EU apiculture sector to excessive or unsustainable pressure.