Huge honey fraud leaves bees helpless

It destroys beekeeper’s livelihoods, consumer’s confidence and harms health

How?

In recent years honey prices have dramatically fallen due to roughly 150 thousand tons per year of fake honey traded internationally up to a third cheaper than authentic one. An economic analysis1 published in 2017 shows that in the same year the average price of honey of seventeen main exporting countries was 22% below the projected theoretical balanced price. Extrapolating from the quoted study, the price was already 40 percent lower for 2019, and falling.

If that trend continues no beekeeper will bear, bees will suffer and decline even more.

How?

By bringing thousands of tons of cheap fake honey into international trade, driving actual beekeepers out of business, who are the chief guardians of bees.

What statistics say

The large number of threats to bees (climate change, environmental pollution, pest and predators, pesticides, loss of habitat) create an adverse environment, not only for their development, but even for their survival. The consequence is the Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), a global fact expressed in the annual loss of hundreds of thousands of colonies and that makes it difficult to believe the inexcusable and surprising growth of honey production in Asia.

Beekeeping is a way to protect the environment and bees. Be must reinforce it, not destroy it just as this huge honey fraud does.

A scientific study—among many others—titled Role of Beekeeping in the Conservation of Forests2 shows how “beekeeping preserves nature, agriculture, sustains livelihoods and provides food security,” and why it “is recommended that developing countries should establish honey councils within their domains as a way of reinforcing the conservation of forests.”

Beekeepers around the world have become some of the main defenders and carers of honey bees. It is easy to understand that if they rely on bees they look after them. However, what is not so evident is, in order to protect honey bees, they have to protect the environment where bees live, thus they protect the whole ecosystem where thousands of species of insects, plants, animals in general and all biodiversity thrive.

1. Honey import price3 (ton)

2. Honey production (FAOSTAT)

3. Honey import prices in the UK (ITC)

4. Percentage of Chinese honey imported by the UK in relation to its total honey imports (ITC)

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Damage to consumer confidence and health: a study reveals

FAO-WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission defines the Economically Motivated Adulteration as a subset of food fraud. It is the intentional substitution or addition of a substance in a product for the purpose of increasing the apparent value of the product or reducing the cost of its production for economic gain. For UK Food Standards Agency—and equivalent institutions in all countries—, food fraud is a crime. It defines it as serious fraud and related criminality in food supply chains. It can be seriously harmful to consumers, food businesses and the wider food industry. That is exactly what happens in honey fraud.

A crime against health

This consumer deception is not only hurtful in itself but could cause harm to health as evidenced by a study published by the National University of Malaysia in 2018, which claims that consumption of adulterated honey induces obesity, increases blood glucose level and demonstrates toxicity effects; moreover its critical finding was that on a 16-weeks study carried out on rats, 31.25% of those who were fed with fake honey were dead on week 7 and the rest showed abnormal behavior like aggressiveness, excessive drinking intake, tachycardia, thinning hair, heavy breathing, lethargy and increase in body weight, fat pads, body mass index, triglyceride, cholesterol and glucose levels, which indicates that adulterated honey consumption leads to obesity and potentially diabetes, besides toxicity effects in liver and kidney.

In this scientific study one third of rats fed with fake honey died prematurely and the rest ended with heavy damaged health, while all rats fed with pure honey improved their health.

Our first sampling... carried out in 2018. This time we bought thirteen honey jars: one in Coop, Aldi, Morrisons, Lidl, Waitrose, Poundland, Sainsbury’s and two in M&S. Asda and Tesco. The purchase criteria were low prices.

Purchases were made in early March 2020 in Bristol, Surrey and Brighton & Hove, and dispatched to FoodQs—a full accredited laboratory in Langenzenn, Germany. Analysis results were delivered 13th of July with following conclusion: all samples are product of this huge and harmful honey fraud.

All samples were fake honey.

Second sampling in the UK?

In new findings in the UK, once again not one was compliant (2020)

So far, HAP’s complaints filed before UK authorities have yielded no results.

Tesco honey "bulk out with sugar"

In a recent analysis of the supermarket’s best-selling honey varieties, six of 12 samples found significant quantities of sugar (up to a third of the weight in one case), and one even contained a low level of antibiotics not permitted in food. In response, the supermarket has since removed the product from all stores. The analysis was commissioned by Public Analyst Scientific Services.

Public Analyst Scientific Services: “The results of this analysis showed the presence of numerous marker compounds found in sugar syrups and was therefore consistent with the addition of sugar syrup."