

Prospects and challenges for the EU apiculture sector

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The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development adopted an own-initiative report by Norbert ERDS (EPP, HU) on the prospects and challenges for the EU apiculture sector.

The report stressed that honey bees, alongside wild bees and other pollinators, perform **fundamental ecosystem and agriculture services** by pollinating flowers, including crops, without which European agriculture would not exist.

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: the report 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: Members suggested broadening and sharing beekeeping research topics and findings. They 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.

The report called on the Commission to **promote and boost European beekeeping research projects**, while stressing the need to encourage private and public investment in technical and scientific know-how at national and EU level. It called on the Member States to ensure appropriate basic and vocational **training** programmes for beekeepers.

Bee health and environmental aspects: the report 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;

- **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: the report 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 considered that honey should always be identifiable along the food supply chain and should be classifiable according to its plant origin, irrespective of whether it is a domestic or an imported product, except in cases of direct transactions between producer and consumer. They 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', the report 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.