Honey: application of measures to improve the production and marketing

1996/0282(CNS) - 23/01/2004

Under Article 6 of Council Regulation 1221/97/EC the Commission is to present to the European Parliament and the Council every three years a report on the implementation of the beekeeping aid scheme. This is the second of the reports. In its conclusions, the Commission proposes that a new Regulation be adopted in order to adapt the objectives in the beekeeping sector to the current situation (please refer to CNS/2004/0003). As regards the situation in the EU, the report states that the EU has a honey deficit and must usually import about half of the honey consumed, self-sufficiency in 2001/02 being 45.9%. The Union's three major honey producers are Spain, Germany and France, with 33 000 tonnes, 26 000 tonnes and 25 000 tonnes of honey respectively in 2001/02. Honey production in the European Union was steady from 1999 to 2002. The report states that there has been a real increase in the sector, although some experts claim the increase observed is due to improved beekeeping statistics. More specifically, on the issue of the implementation of honey programmes, in the first report on the implementation of honey programmes, the Commission pointed out that these programmes had had a qualitative impact on the beekeeping sector, that it would be desirable to reinforce collaboration between the authorities in certain Member States and the beekeepers' representative organisations and cooperatives, and that it appeared necessary to simplify the management of the honey programmes. Following these conclusions, the Commission adopted an amendment to Regulation 2300/97/EC to allow the Member States to continue their honey programmes from the previous year simply by notifying any amendments or adjustments. It should be noted that the control of varroasis is the largest expenditure item in most Member States, accounting for 41% of programmed expenditure at European level. Technical assistance comes next with 26%, and then transhumance with 20%, followed by honey analyses (6%) and applied research projects (7%). As a rule, Community beekeepers believe that the objectives of Regulation 1221 /97/EC are not sufficient to guarantee the profitability of bee farms or to prevent the disappearance of professional beekeeping. Community beekeeping is threatened by bee diseases which are more and more difficult to treat (resistance to the few products authorised) thus increasing production costs. Moreover, contamination by certain pesticides in many EU Member States has led to the disappearance of a large part of the bee population (restocking hives is extremely difficult and expensive) and to falls in productivity. On the issue of imports, the report highlights that Union is the world's major import market, absorbing 44% of all honey imports. There is a trend towards concentration of holdings as the number of hives operated by professionals is increasing faster than the total number of hives in the European Union. In any event, the number of hives has increased. Control of varroasis remains the sector's priority. Confusion with health legislation measures should be avoided. The conclusions of the group of experts in this field show that: chemical treatments are effective, provided they are rotated; harmonised and simplified procedures for the approval of new active ingredients would appear necessary; alternative treatments depend on weather conditions and theproduction system and research into the selection of bees resistant to varroasis should be stepped up. Regulation 1221/97/EC to improve production and marketing of honey in the European Union seems to have helped the beekeeping sector. This sector is characterised by a wide diversity of production conditions, and by the dispersion and variety of players both at the production and at the marketing stage. The priority measures in the Regulation, although limited from the budget point of view, have been valuable in terms of quality. The most popular measures in order of importance are the control of varroasis, technical assistance and the rationalisation of transhumance. It would appear appropriate to draw up national programmes for three-year periods and thus recognise that, in practice, there is a strong degree of similarity between programmes from one year to the next. Some of the priority measures should be redefined in order to avoid misinterpretations when implementing them, and to adapt them to the current situation in European beekeeping. In this context, a new measure would appear necessary to promote the repopulation of hives in decline in some regions. The honey analyses measure could be abolished.