

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank **MEP Elena Yoncheva** for taking the initiative to convene the conference **EU Honey Market Integrity: Trade Importance and Fraud Risks** at this critical moment. My name is Jürgen Binder; I worked as a professional beekeeper in Germany and Italy for 25 years and have been President of the New Beekeepers' Association (www.neuer-imkerbund.de) for several years.

Honey adulteration is the biggest problem facing beekeepers worldwide. Rice syrup, which is processed in such a way that it cannot be identified using current methods, is destroying honey prices and the integrity of the product. This has now reached the point where beekeepers can no longer sell their honey harvests, not only in Europe but also in South America and Asia. For a long time, we have watched as honey in supermarkets has become cheaper and cheaper. However, since honey packers in Germany now only pay prices that are far below production costs, even the most good-natured beekeepers have woken up to draw attention to this problem.

I was in China three weeks ago, and there too, syrups are sometimes sold as honey – much to the grief of Chinese beekeepers. The China Bee Products Association (CBPA) is fighting against this market distortion in its own country and has brought down some of the criminal counterfeiters. Chinese beekeepers, too, are no longer achieving the prices necessary to sustain their operations. For almost all beekeepers there earn their living from their bees, they have increased their number of bee colonies and boosted their production, in the desperate belief that selling larger quantities would solve the problem. As we know, this is a vicious circle that does not lead to the desired result.

The syrup manufacturers are large food companies, but they are not members of the Chinese Beekeepers' Association, and the Association naturally has no executive power to take action against the companies producing this syrup. Every beekeeper in the Association must sign a declaration guaranteeing that they do not mix syrup into their honey. Anyone who violates this rule is expelled from the Association for lifetime.

We have invited the board of the Chinese Beekeepers' Association to visit Germany. They have accepted this invitation and will be guests of the German Professional Beekeepers' Association (DBIB). We expect our guests in November this year. I am convinced that this contact will increase mutual understanding and strengthen trust. Together, we are looking for ways to finally put a stop to this fraud.

The companies that produce sugar syrup are, of course, well known to them, as they openly advertise that they can supply this syrup for diluting and adulterating honey. But is it a criminal offence to sell syrup that possesses certain characteristics? The Chinese authorities say: No. The criminal activity takes place in Germany, France, Belgium – in short, wherever honey bottlers have so far been operating with impunity, because adulterating valuable honey with cheap syrup undetected is extremely lucrative.

Why, of all places, have the three European countries mentioned – where the largest volumes of honey are traded – failed to sign the FEEDM position paper of 17 November 2025, entitled 'Official Control Methods for the Detection of Foreign Sugar Addition in Honey'? The FEEDM is the European Federation of Honey Packers and Distributors, which, incidentally, is based in Germany. This is the organisation whose members purchase, repackage, relabel, resell and market the sweet substances arriving in Europe.

This whole affair looks very much as though those in charge in these countries are denying the fraud in order to continue it for as long as possible, or to cover it up. Of course, this is merely a conjecture; I am, after all, not an authority with the right to conduct investigations. But who else would put the fake honey on the market other than the honey packers and long-standing market partners of the supermarkets?

As president of a German beekeepers' association, I demand an explanation from the German Honey Association, which is a member of FEEDM, as to why it is resisting the introduction of new methods to assess the authenticity of honey. Given that the APIMONDIA World Congress is to take place in Germany in 2029, we expect all German stakeholders to actively contribute to putting an end to the fraud involving fake honey. As the German Honey Association is an associate member of APIMONDIA, we will submit a motion to expel this association from APIMONDIA should it fail from now on to actively participate in uncovering fraudulent activities and to expel those of its members who are involved in this fraud from its association. This announcement concerns all members of APIMONDIA who do not actively participate in the fight against honey fraud.

For the Chinese Beekeepers' Association (CBPA), the fight against honey adulteration with sugar syrups is a priority. It has no doubt whatsoever that this is taking place. This is confirmed by a letter from its president, Yang Rong, dated 20 April this year. Even though the declaration requirements for exports are clear – honey must be declared separately from sugar syrup – it is an open secret in China that a certain proportion of the volume appearing in the statistics as honey exports is actually sugar syrup. One can well imagine how this misdeclaration is possible.

But what is the real problem with prices that do not cover costs? The customer has become accustomed to a price that bears no relation to the price of genuine honey. Since prices have not risen, as all other prices in our economy have, but have instead fallen continuously, the general public is completely unaware of the value of this product from the bee colony.

If beekeepers cannot achieve a sufficient price, they will downsize, cease and shut down their businesses. No one can produce below production costs in the long run. As this situation has persisted for several years, we find ourselves in an extremely precarious position. I spoke about this problem here two years ago to officials from the Commission. Nothing has been done that is reflected in the market. Nothing has been done.

What else can we beekeepers' associations do but draw your attention, ladies and gentlemen from the political and administrative spheres, to this problem and ask you to put a stop to this criminal and harmful behaviour?

The pollination of many crops also depends on honeybees. Alongside wild bees, butterflies and other pollinating insects, honeybees make a particularly effective contribution to pollination due to their large numbers, especially when the windows of good weather are short. Are we not dependent on stable, good harvests? In view of the many threats such as erosion, climate change, the uncertain availability of fertiliser and fuel, unstable supply chains and world market prices that fluctuate sharply due to acts of war, we must not also jeopardise food security through increasingly unstable pollination services. Ladies and gentlemen, these are not just empty words. Would you do your job, or be able to do it, if you were unable to consistently earn the income you need for your work? You would look for another job. And this process has already begun in Europe's beekeeping sector.

Did we not hear during the Covid crisis that we needed to restore our independence because global supply chains are highly volatile? Have the lessons from this crisis been forgotten so quickly?

In not a single discussion on Mercosur have I received an answer to my question as to how European beekeeping will be supported if, in stages, up to 45,000 tonnes of additional duty-free honey is now to be imported from South America into Europe. I have only heard that we need this agreement to strengthen our automotive industry. Who is thinking about the threatened ecosystem services when thousands of beekeeping businesses in Europe are set to close? The decline in biodiversity will be lamented, as will the lack of pollination security. All of this is self-inflicted, with trade agreements that serve only the economy and leave agriculture to its fate. And yet we would not need honey imports at all. If training for beekeepers were improved, self-sufficiency in honey in Germany and Europe would be possible without major investment. The fact that the sector is so poorly organised, has such low margins and, due to the unprofitability of the profession, is dominated by many hobby beekeepers

is solely to blame for our pitiful level of self-sufficiency. The lack of minimum standards, including regarding animal welfare, and the absence of a mandatory certificate of competence for keeping bees also contribute to the decline of the sector.

Furthermore, these 45,000 tonnes open the floodgates to further fraud as long as we allow this product to go unchecked for authenticity. Ladies and gentlemen, we must not allow agriculture to become a pawn of international markets. Agriculture in Europe means local jobs here, regional cultural and flavour diversity for our consumers, a diverse cultural landscape that also serves tourism interests, a stable food supply, and greater confidence in product quality due to shorter supply chains, which in turn lead to lower energy consumption. This can also be quantified in monetary terms. Why are these values not being taken into account?

If the price of honey does not normalise within the next few months, we will need support measures for our farms in Europe. The longer this situation persists, the more dramatic the consequences will be.

It will soon be virtually impossible to run a beekeeping business without a pollination premium per colony equivalent to the subsidy paid per hectare of land. This is the costly consequence of thoughtlessly signing trade agreements and tolerating unfair practices on the international honey market. It is also regrettable that regulations, for example in the field of organic beekeeping, are interpreted and applied differently across various countries. This also distorts the market and is detrimental to the growth of the organic sector.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is not the task of beekeepers and beekeeping associations to put a stop to this honey fraud. We have drawn your attention to the consequences of this ongoing fraud. The authenticity of honey, a valuable product, is relevant not only to producers and the environment, but also to consumers. Act now; tomorrow it will already be too late.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Jürgen Binder