



PURER THAN PURE, POLLINATION SERVICES

Natural. Pure. Healthy. Sweet. Honey, no matter where in the world and in both ancient and modern times, has always been associated with these four characteristics. However, there now seems to be something even more natural, more pure, healthier and sweeter than honey. Today's producers, consumers and markets have "organic" honey.

Organic beekeeping is a recent phenomenon, growing in response to the global changes in beekeeping management, particularly the spread of *varroa* and its treatments.

Conversion to organic practices has barely started in a few countries. It has a chance to grow if it is associated with agricultural practices that recognize bees' importance beyond the production of honey, such as their role in pollination and therefore the maintenance of the ecosystem and agriculture production levels.

Certified organic beekeeping represents a small percentage of all beekeeping (0.6 percent in some European countries), and is almost non-existent in developing countries. At the same time, **much of the exported honey from developing countries, even if not certified, is produced under very close to, if not better, conditions than organic European honey.**



Beehives in organic field, Italy

As with the rest of agriculture, for the past 50 years beekeeping has increasingly relied on chemicals to solve disease problems and to adjust to selection and production pressures. This approach, together with globalization of trade, has allowed the spreading of once-rare bee diseases, such as the *varroa* mite. As a result, beekeepers began experimenting on their own, developing an array of chemicals for disease control inside the beehive. Those chemicals eventually found their way into many honeys.



Beehive on a village forest, Guinea

organic APICULTURE

Converting production to have organic certification is not a major obstacle for honey coming from forests or extensive cultivation areas in countries without major honey bee diseases.



In addition, it is relatively easy to control compliance with residue analysis and equipment control. However, if there are serious disease problems, converting to organic production means substantial increase in cost, due to increased losses and labour required for disease control management.



Flamboyante bush provides habitat to pollinators

Organic beekeeping for various products (mostly honey and wax, but also pollen, propolis and royal jelly) has to follow principles similar to those for other organic livestock production. Management methods, food sources, material choices, and disease control and prevention are closely regulated.

Organic beekeepers have to ensure that the food of their bees is free from pesticides and residues. In general, beehives need to be surrounded by an area with a radius of at least 3 km² in which only organic or similar agriculture or clean wild habitat exist, far away from other polluting sources such as cities, industrial complexes or highways. In addition, regulations cover origin of bees, stock replenishing, feed materials, medicines, equipment and harvesting methods.

No doubt there will be a growing market for organic honey, although there may be a decreasing number of beekeepers in the developed world who can comply with the organic rules.



With the growth of organic agriculture in general, there is hope that organic beekeeping will grow, particularly since pollination and bee forage are essential elements of organic practices.



Photos: Frank J. Be, Pixabay - M. Laurent - G. Bouché

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