

Exporting Honey and Sweeteners to Europe.

Europe offers interesting opportunities for exporters of honey and sweeteners. The information on this page can help you make use of these opportunities.

• 1) What competition do you face

Competition in the European honey market is falling both at a product level and at the company level. The increased European demand for honey and the insufficient supplies put exporters from developing countries (DCs) in a very favourable position. Indeed, this is the perfect time to enter the European honey market.

1 . What are the opportunities and barriers when I try to access the honey market?

Low entry barriers

Technology and capital needs for the production of honey are relatively low compared to other sectors. The equipment required for the processing of honey (extractor and homogenisation tank) does not have to be very expensive and is often simple to operate.

At the same time, the favourable market situation creates room for new entrants in the EU honey market. More specifically, the substantial drop in European bee populations has caused production to fall in recent years. The inability of existing European suppliers to meet the continuing high demand for honey creates opportunities for DC exporters.

Tip:

- The inadequate output of domestic suppliers forces European honey importers to demand supply consistency from other sources. Build up long-term trading relationships with your own suppliers in order to secure stable supplies.

Buyers need detailed documentation

EU requirements on European retailers in matters of transparency and accountability place a huge administrative burden on honey importers. To minimise this burden, European importers increasingly require suppliers to provide detailed information on their products. These overhead administrative costs make the import of small quantities of honey less attractive, thus making it more difficult for smaller DC exporters to enter this market.

Tip:

- Do not underestimate the value of elaborate documentation for successful entry to the European honey market. In particular some German buyers tend to apply higher quality standards than their peers in other European markets.

Strict quality requirements of European buyers

The EU has established food hygiene and safety regulations that are stricter than those prevailing in other regions. Moreover, European buyers often apply even

stricter requirements of their own. These can vary from composition specifications to colour and taste preferences and organic/Fairtrade certifications. Hence, DC exporters who only comply with EU legal requirements may find it difficult to enter the market and target specific buyers.

Tip:

- Work in close collaboration with your buyer to meet the required product specifications, and gather information about product specifications within the different market channels and segments. For more information please refer to our study about the [buyer requirements on the European honey market](#).

2 . What are the most popular substitutes for honey in the European market?

High risk of substitution in the industrial sector

The baker's honey used by the food industry is often of a lower quality than table honey. However, even baker's honey as an ingredient is more expensive than other available sweeteners such as syrups. There is thus a high risk that honey will be replaced by syrups and other cheaper sweeteners for use in the food industry. However, the risk of substitution in this field is gradually falling, as manufacturers in the food industry nowadays tend to look for natural sweeteners such as honey because they are perceived to be healthier.

Tip:

- If you are targeting the industrial sector, make sure you offer your honey at competitive prices. At the same time, you should stress that your honey is a natural, pure product in order to meet the growing consumer preference for healthy natural foods. For more information see our study about the [trends on the European market for honey](#).

Substitutes pose a relatively low threat to table honey

European honey is primarily destined for the consumer market and used both as a spread and as a sweetener. There is relatively low competition to honey as a spread from other spreads available on the European market, such as jams and syrups. Similarly, honey as a sweetener, for example in tea and breakfast products, is also in a strong position. Sugar, which is the primary substitute for honey as a sweetener, is becoming less popular in the European market. Low competition from honey substitutes is attributed mostly to its image as a natural, pure product, which is increasingly appreciated by consumers. Honey faces competition on the shelf from products such as agave nectar and maple syrup, which are also natural but may be cheaper. There is a higher risk of substitution in EU countries where these products are popular, such as the UK, Germany and Denmark.

Tip:

- To reduce the threat of substitution you are recommended not only to meet but to exceed buyer requirements and to differentiate your honey by sustainability, traceability or other features that can contribute to your uniqueness.

Convenience boosts popularity

Convenience is an important selling point for European consumers, who want to enjoy products with minimum effort. This trend is also applicable to honey. Honey in a "squeezy bottle" is becoming steadily more popular, even though it has been

around for many years. Hence, there is a growing industry demand for honey with a higher fructose/glucose ratio, which stays liquid for a longer time. This represents a threat to other types of honey.

Tip:

- If you can offer honey that stays liquid longer, make sure you let your buyer know about this. If you do not already do so, you should investigate the possibility of taking advantage of this trend by sourcing more honey with a high fructose/glucose ratio.

3 . Who are my rivals when I am exporting honey to the EU market?

Key players' decline makes room for new DC exporters

Competition in the European honey market is diverse. The key suppliers include China and Argentina, while European countries also supply a large proportion of European honey. However, there have recently been supply issues that create opportunities for DC exporters:

- **China** is Europe's main supplier of low-priced honey for industrial use and blends targeted at the mainstream market. However, quality issues have worsened the position of Chinese honey in the global honey market, making the EU more cautious about buying honey from China.
- Until a decade ago, **Argentina** was Europe's main honey supplier. However, a heavy loss of bee colonies and bee forage has severely affected Argentinean honey supplies. On top of that, a ruling of the European Court of Justice that honey must be labelled to indicate that it contains pollen, and that manufacturers must demonstrate that this pollen does not come from genetically modified crops, put further pressure on imports of Argentinean honey.
- Declining bee colonies in European countries have led to a drop in **European** honey production. As a major global consumer of honey, Europe is thus obliged to increase its honey imports to meet the increasing demand for honey. This creates new opportunities for DC suppliers.

Tip:

- Make sure your honey's quality is consistent and your bee colonies are healthy. For example, protect bee populations by developing policies to limit the use of dangerous pesticides. For more information on the topic of honey containing genetically modified pollen, read our study about the [buyer requirements on the European market](#).

4 . How much power do I have as a supplier?

Price competitiveness improves supplier power

Honey production does not require high-tech expertise, but it is a very labour-intensive process. Consequently, the price of honey depends largely on labour costs in the country of origin and the productivity of the beekeepers. Higher yields lead to a lower product price and higher pay for beekeepers.

Tip:

- Increase your scale of operations and invest in both training and access to modern hives for beekeepers, to improve production efficiency (yields) and cut prices.

Less competition in niche markets

For example, monofloral honeys are very popular among European consumers but it is difficult to ensure the required stable supplies. Organic industrial honey is another interesting niche market. The demand for organic industrial honey is increasing, but there are only few areas in Europe where it is possible to practice organic beekeeping. One of the conditions for organic honey production, the absence of chemical contamination within a 3km radius from the beehives, is increasingly hard to meet. Moreover, Brazil, the largest supplier of organic honeys, is unable to offer the low prices that industrial users require. Consequently, honey importers are looking for new sources of these honeys. This substantially increases the bargaining power of honey suppliers that can meet the relevant requirements in this niche market.

Tip:

- If you can offer niche honeys to the European market, take care to inform potential buyers clearly about the features that make your honey a niche product. You should also make sure you can substantiate your claims, for example by providing the relevant certificates. For more information on the popularity of niche honeys, please refer to the module [CBI Trends for Honey in the EU](#).

Importers use blending to maximise their power

Honey imported into the EU is hardly ever sold to the market in its original condition. European importers blend different types of honey together to produce the right quantities at a consistent quality. This allows them to be flexible with their sources and switch between suppliers if necessary.

Tip:

- Invest in a strong, long-term relationship with your buyers to minimise the risk that they will switch to another supplier.

Depreciation of Euro puts importers' margins under pressure

Economic developments are also an important factor when it comes to the competitive forces that shape the European honey market. The depreciation of the Euro against the dollar definitely affects the honey market, by decreasing the buying power of European honey importers. Moreover, European importers cannot charge their customers for cost increases due to currency variations. An immediate effect of this trend is that the European market is becoming a more price-competitive destination for honey exports. In addition, importers are becoming increasingly price-sensitive, so suppliers who can offer competitive prices will have a solid negotiating position.

Tip:

- This trend is making the European market a less attractive destination for exports. You will need to offer very competitive prices (or more value), as importers have little room to negotiate. Moreover, exchange rates between currencies can change rapidly, so make sure you keep up to date on this subject. You can monitor exchange rates at for example the [Oanda website](#).

• 2) Which trends offers opportunities?

European consumers prefer low-calorie, natural and healthy sweeteners. They are focusing more on healthy alternatives to refined sugar, such as raw cane sugar, honey and palm sugar. They are also paying more attention to food safety issues and sustainable trade.

1 . Demand for low-calorie products

Sugar replacement offers many opportunities for suppliers of low-calorie sweeteners such as stevia, aspartame and sucralose. Food manufacturers can use these high-intensity sweeteners to maintain the sweetness of their products. They also use them to label their products as 'light' or 'with less sugar' and position them as healthier products than the original product.

European consumers are increasingly concerned about their health. In particular, obesity is one of the main health issues. As a result, consumers are trying to avoid products and ingredients with a high calorie level, such as refined white sugar.

According to projections by the European Union, sugar consumption in the European Union will decrease by about 5% in the next decade.

The decrease in sugar consumption will be stimulated by European governments that are also increasingly concerned about widespread obesity problems due to high calorie intake.

Governments of several countries have imposed a 'sugar tax' (excise duties) on various products containing sugar, such as confectionery, ice cream and soft drinks. However, Denmark and Finland abandoned their sugar and fat tax due to negative economic and political side effects.

The United Kingdom will introduce a sugar tax in 2018. Furthermore, the European Union has developed policies to ban sugar in fruit juices.

In line with this trend, food manufacturers are reducing the level of sugar in certain products. They often lower the sugar content of their products in small steps of around 30% and replace it with alternative low-calorie sweeteners.

This step-wise approach to sugar reduction limits the effect on taste of the products, as consumers can slowly adapt to the new tastes.

Tips:

- If you offer a low-calorie sweetener, provide information on the use of your sweetener for sugar replacement.
- Keep up-to-date about the latest European regulations and public campaigns within the sugar debate to anticipate changes in demand for alternative sweeteners. Useful sources include European Parliament News and FoodNavigator.

2 . Consumers prefer natural sweeteners

In addition to the reduction of sugar intake, consumer concerns about artificial sweeteners are also gaining substantial importance.

Artificial sweeteners are chemically synthesised and do not appear in nature. Examples include aspartame, sucralose and acesulfame K.

Due to multiple stories about the potentially negative health effects of artificial sweeteners, consumer demand for products without artificial ingredients has increased.

Consumers are looking for products with natural sweeteners instead. These are extracted from plants and have been processed with techniques which are considered to be close to nature, such as heating, distillation and filtering.

The exact definition of natural is still a subject of debate. Examples of natural sweeteners include palm sugar, stevia, yacon and lucuma. See our studies about [palm sugar](#), [yacon](#) and [lucuma](#) for more market information.

Tips:

- Promote the natural features of your product. Show the natural origin and explain the production process to clarify your definition of the term 'natural'.
- For more [information on use of the term 'natural'](#) on product labels, refer to this article by [Beveragedaily.com](#).

3 . High interest in potential health benefit

In line with demand for low-calorie products and natural sweeteners, consumers are also interested in products with potential health benefits.

Examples of sweeteners with such perceived health benefits include raw sugars, which contain more nutrients than refined white sugar.

Diabetic consumers also show interest in sweeteners with a low Glycaemic Index, such as coconut palm sugar.

Although several sweeteners, including honey, often have a traditional use as a medicinal or therapeutic product, their potential health benefits cannot be promoted in Europe. This requires scientific evidence for authorisation by European Union authorities, which is generally not available.

Tip:

- Promote the health properties of your product, but only claim health benefits which are backed up by scientific evidence. Access the European Union Register database for all [nutrition and health claims allowed in Europe](#).

4 . Innovative use of honey and sweeteners

Many European consumers are interested in innovative products with new flavours. The food industry is constantly looking for new and alternative sweeteners that can be used in food products.

European consumers are particularly interested in new sweeteners which are low in calories, natural and healthy. One example is lucuma, a caramel-flavoured fruit from Peru that can be used in ice cream and other snacks. It is increasingly used by companies for its taste as well as its natural and vitamin-rich properties.

About 25% of the honey consumed in Europe is used as an ingredient in food products. Although honey is not an innovative ingredient in itself, food and drink manufacturers still innovate with honey as an ingredient in products such as salty-sweet snacks, ready-to-drink tea and cereals.

In recent years, honey has also become trendy as an addition to specialty drinks, flavoured spirits and distilled beverages.

In the table honey market, which constitutes the other 75% of the honey market, the squeeze bottle has been a major innovation. Introduction of the squeeze bottle has resulted in higher demand for liquid honey (with a high fructose/glucose ratio of >1.2).

Tips:

- In your promotion, show examples of innovative applications of your honey or sweetener.
- If you can offer industrial honey at low prices, target food and drink manufacturers to benefit from growth in this segment.
- In order to offer honeys for squeeze bottles and creamed honey separately, find out how long it takes for your different honeys to crystallise and send samples to a laboratory to determine the fructose/glucose ratio. Separate honeys that stay liquid for a long time from the ones that crystallise fast.
- Use marketing stories that focus on the honey's origin, taste, colour and other distinct characteristics, especially if you are targeting niche markets.

5 . Restrictions on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)

Many European consumers are afraid of the implications of GMO products. These products are therefore a subject of debate in European politics, and the market will remain very restricted in the short term. This will limit possibilities for sweeteners from Genetically Modified (GM) crops.

Currently, GM cane sugar and any other GM sweeteners are not authorised to be sold in Europe. In the next three years, GM sweeteners are not expected to be authorised for sale either. Not a single authorisation procedure has been started for these products, and these procedures typically take a few years including all the preparatory work.

Specifically for honey, there has been a lot of attention on GMOs and many importers currently demand honey with a GMO-free certificate. In 2011, a German beekeeper complained to the authorities about the introduction of GM maize in the vicinity of his beehives, which would not allow him to market his honey because of European Union legislation on GM foods.

This complaint led to a discussion on labelling of honey from areas with GM crops. The outcome was positive for honey exporters: GM pollen has to be labelled only if it makes up more than 0.9% of the honey, which is practically never the case.

Tips:

- See our study about [European buyer requirements for the honey and sweeteners market](#).
- If you produce a GM sweetener, you cannot enter the European market in the short term. Authorisation procedures typically require expensive research costing up to hundreds of thousands of euros and are not economically feasible for SMEs.

6 . Fairtrade certification on the rise

Consumers in Europe are increasingly concerned about suppliers on the other end of the supply chain. Consumers' purchasing behaviour is increasingly influenced by social factors, such as the working conditions of producers.

Some European consumers respond to this by switching to locally produced honey and sweeteners. Other consumers feel responsible for a fairer trade of products from the poorest producers in the world.

Currently, Fairtrade is the most popular certification scheme related to the conditions of producers. Fairtrade certified producers of cane and natural sweeteners can benefit from the Fairtrade premium that Fairtrade importers pay to profit from contribution funds managed by their producer organisations.

Tips:

- If you or your suppliers are organised in a Small Producer Organisation or beekeeper cooperative, you can implement standards of Fairtrade International for honey, cane sugar or other sweeteners.
- See our study about European buyer requirements for the honey and sweeteners market for more information about certification.

7 . Environmental consumer awareness

European consumers are increasingly concerned about the impact of agricultural activities on the environment, and are looking for products with a small environmental impact.

This trend has stimulated the market for organic certified products. The organic market in Europe is increasingly becoming mainstream and is highly developed in Western European countries such as Germany, France and the United Kingdom.

The European Union has been actively promoting organic production by developing one harmonised standard and product logo for application in the entire European Union. The Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 lays down all rules on the organic market in the European Union.

Tip:

- If your production system is organic by default or conversion requires little investment, apply for organic certification. See our study about European buyer requirements for the honey and sweeteners market for more information on the regulation for organic products on the European Union market.

8 . Limited European production of alternative sweeteners

While alternative, natural sweeteners are becoming more popular, the supply to Europe is largely dependent on imports as most of these sweeteners are not produced in Europe. This is mainly due to the specific growing conditions that are needed to produce the crops used for these sweeteners.

For example, both lucuma and yacon (syrup) are only produced in the Andes region in Latin America. In addition, while the palm trees for palm sugar production can be grown in various regions, these are also not suitable for European production. Palm sugar is mainly produced in tropical and West Africa, Madagascar and Southern/Southeast Asia.

Tips:

- Take advantage of Europe's increasing need for imports, which creates many opportunities for exporters of sweeteners in developing countries.

- For more information about specific sweeteners, see our studies on [monofloral honey](#), [Fairtrade honey](#), [organic honey](#), [industrial honey](#), [palm sugar](#), [raw cane sugar](#), [yacon syrup](#) and [lucuma](#).

9 . Decline in European production of honey

The production levels in Europe are decreasing. Currently, only 60% of the European honey market is self-sufficient, and that ratio is expected to decline even more in the long term.

Several factors contribute to the overall decline of the European beekeeping sector. These include intensive agriculture and pesticide use. The European Union has proposed a regulation against the use of certain pesticides ([Regulation \(EU\) No 485/2013](#)). The European Union's proposal targets pesticides used in the treatment of plants and cereals that are attractive to bees and pollinators.

The new regulation is expected to have a positive effect on bee health and bee populations in Europe. However, honey production is not likely to increase significantly as a result. Large-scale honey production is becoming less profitable due to increasing labour costs and the fact that pollination receives priority over honey production.

Tip:

- See [our study with trade statistics for honey](#) for data on the decline in European honey production.

10 . More testing to counter honey laundering

Honey laundering refers to the re-labelling of honey from one origin to another, with the aim to improve the perceived quality by honey buyers. Sometimes honey exporters in countries which are not on the 'third country list' or which have a bad reputation cooperate with international traders to 'launder' honey.

In 2011, Chinese honey was shipped to Thailand and India and then re-labelled before it entered Europe and the US. Although China is on the 'third country list', the country has a bad reputation and many European importers avoid Chinese honey.

European buyers are increasingly testing imported honey on region-specific honey characteristics. This allows them to determine if a honey has been laundered and take counter-measures.

Tips:

- Urge the authorities in your country to prevent honey laundering by taking strict quality control measures on a national level. For more information on the ethical charter for the international honey trade, please refer to Apimondia's [report](#).
- See our study on [European buyer requirements for honey and sweeteners](#) for more information on the countries authorised to trade honey to Europe.

11 . Monofloral honeys

Monofloral varieties such as acacia, clover, fir and pine are gaining popularity in the leading European honey markets. Consumption of these honeys and other monofloral honeys from outside Europe is increasing at annual rates of 5-15% and is expected to grow further compared to blended honeys.

However, there are differences between consumer preferences in different European countries. For example, the United Kingdom, Germany and France are among the European honey markets with the highest interest in monofloral honeys. In these countries, even supermarket chains focusing on mainstream products offer a range of monofloral honeys.

Tip:

- If your company offers monofloral honey varieties, stay informed about the different country preferences for honey. Make sure that the range of monofloral honey you can offer is clearly communicated to your buyers. Focusing on the flower origin and its natural features can be a great marketing story behind your product.
- See our study on [monofloral honey](#) for more specific information on this market.

• **3) Through what channels can you get honey onto the European market?**

The European honey trade is highly concentrated, with only a few dominant importers in each country. These importers generally supply their honey directly to industrial users and retailers, who account for around 25% and 75% of the total honey market respectively. Monofloral honeys and organic honeys comprise particularly interesting sub-segments for those exporters who are looking for product distinction.

• **4) What requirements should your product comply with?**

Quality management and food safety are core themes on the European market for honey and sweeteners. This includes contamination and adulteration. In the growing niche markets for organic and fair trade products, you must also go through the respective certification schemes.

1 . What legal and non-legal requirements must your product comply with?

When exporting your product to Europe, you have to comply with legally binding requirements. All European food legislation is established according to the principles of traceability, risk analysis and precautionary measures.

Pre-market approval for honey

Legislation of the European Union prohibits honey imported from countries outside the '[third country list](#)'.

If your country is on the 'third country list', this means it has established systems for residue monitoring and can effectively prevent honey exports which are not in compliance with European Union requirements.

If your country is not yet on the third country list, but aims to be included, it must develop a Residue Monitoring Plan (RMP).

The RMP guarantees that the honey imported into the European Union does not contain any prohibited residues or veterinary drugs, such as chloramphenicol.

Tip:

- Your country's government is responsible for the RMP. The Ministry of Agriculture or a department of that Ministry is usually the responsible authority. If your country is not allowed to export honey to the European Union, approach the relevant authority for your country and convince them to prepare the RMP.

Food safety – traceability, hygiene and control

Food safety is a key issue in European Union food legislation. The General Food Law is the legislative framework for food safety in the European Union. To guarantee food safety and to allow appropriate action in cases of unsafe food, your food product must be traceable throughout the entire supply chain.

An important aspect of controlling food safety hazards is defining critical control points (HACCP) by implementing food safety management principles.

In addition, each batch of honey must be accompanied by a health certificate signed and stamped by a veterinary officer authorised by the relevant authorities of the exporting country. A model health certificate can be found in Appendix VI to Annex VI of Regulation (EC) 1664/2004.

Exports of sweeteners such as sugar do not require a health or sanitary certificate.

Once your products arrive in Europe, they are subject to official controls.

If European companies or authorities find that the safety of your product can't be guaranteed, they will take the product off the market and will register it in the European Union's Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed.

Tips:

- Establish a traceability system and keep samples for each of your suppliers to trace the origin of a product in case of non-conformance.
- Keep your facilities clean by setting strict operating procedures, such as cleaning schedules for your processing equipment. Business operators such as processors are required by law to comply with the European Union legislation on hygiene of foodstuffs (Regulation (EC) 852/2004).
- Search the European Union's Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) database to see examples of withdrawals from the market and the reasons behind these withdrawals.
- Implement procedures based on Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles. Obtaining the actual certification of HACCP is not obligatory.
- Prepare a quality manual which describes your measures to control hygiene. Such a manual is an integral part of a quality management system. You will need this when you want to become certified for your quality management system (e.g. HACCP or ISO 22000).

- European Union legislation also recommends that honey sector support organisations develop guides for good hygiene practices. These guides should be based on relevant codes of practice of the [Codex Alimentarius](#).

Pesticide residues

The European Union has set Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) for pesticides in food products, which you can look up in the [Pesticides database](#).

Your honey may, for example, be contaminated by pesticides applied by farmers in the area around your beehives. When bees collect a lot of nectar in areas where farmers have applied excessive amounts of pesticides, the MRL for the applied pesticide may be exceeded.

If you are a producer of sweeteners such as cane sugar, yacon or lucuma, you have full control over pesticides application on your farm and must take measures to prevent their excessive use.

Regulation 396/2005 establishes [Maximum Residue Levels for pesticides in food](#).

Tips:

- Refer to the European Union's [MRL database](#) to identify the MRLs that are relevant for your product. There you can find the list of MRLs related to your product.
- Send samples of your product to a laboratory for analysis of pesticide residues to determine if these residues are within the limits set by the European Union. If they are not, you must cooperate with farmers to change the pesticides, lower their use or, in the case of honey, move your beehives to another location.
- For more information on MRLs, please refer to the [EU Export Helpdesk](#).

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)

Sweeteners made of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) such as cane sugar are currently not authorised for sale on the European market.

If you want authorisation of GMOs for your product, you will need to apply to the European Food Safety Authority for a risk assessment.

The application must comply with [Regulation 503/2013](#).

As of May 2016, no applications for GMO sweeteners had been made. The high costs of necessary research in relation to expected benefits are keeping suppliers of GMO sweeteners from applying.

In September 2011 the European Court of Justice decided that honey with traces of pollen from genetically modified crops needed special authorisation and labelling before it could be sold in Europe. However, since July 2014, the European Parliament has given authorisation to consider pollen a 'constituent' rather than an 'ingredient'. In doing so, honey containing genetically modified pollen will not have to be labelled as containing GMOs when the pollen content is less than 0.9%.

Tips:

- If you are currently producing GM cane sugar but want to target Europe, find out if it is feasible to switch to non-GMO cane sugar.

- [Subscribe to the newsletter of the European Parliament](#) to stay informed of the developments concerning the marketing and labelling of your GMO-containing products.

European Union honey legislation

Your honey needs to comply with directive [\(EC\) 110/2001](#). This directive sets European requirements for honey quality standards and labelling. Requirements regarding honey composition are specifically described in the table below.

In addition to these requirements, your honey must comply with the general food and safety regulations which have been mentioned above.

Table 1 Composition criteria for honey

1.1. Fructose and glucose content (sum of both) – blossom honey – honeydew honey, blends of honeydew honey with blossom honey	not less than 60 g/100 g not less than 45 g/100 g
1.2. Sucrose content – in general – false acacia (<i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i>), alfalfa (<i>Medicago sativa</i>), Menzies Banksia (<i>Banksia menziesii</i>), French honeysuckle (<i>Hedysarum</i>), red gum (<i>Eucalyptus camaldulensis</i>), leatherwood (<i>Eucryphia lucida</i> , <i>Eucryphia milliganii</i>), Citrus spp. – lavender (<i>Lavandula</i> spp.), borage (<i>Borago officinalis</i>)	not more than 5 g/100 g not more than 10 g/100 g not more than 15 g/100 g
2. Moisture content – in general – heather (<i>Calluna</i>) and baker's honey in general – baker's honey from heather (<i>Calluna</i>)	not more than 20 % not more than 23 % not more than 25 %
3. Water-insoluble content – in general – pressed honey	not more than 0.1 g/100 g not more than 0.5 g/100 g
4. Electrical conductivity – honey not listed below, and blends of these honeys – honeydew and chestnut honey and blends of these, except for those listed below – exceptions: strawberry tree (<i>Arbutus unedo</i>), bell heather (<i>Erica</i>), eucalyptus, lime (<i>Tilia</i> spp.), ling heat	not more than 0,8 mS/cm not more than 0,8 mS/cm
5. Free acid – in general	not more than 50 milli-equivalents acid per 1,000 g

– baker's honey	not more than 80 milli-equivalents acid per 1,000 g
6. Diastase activity and hydroxymethylfurfural content (HMF) determined after processing and blending (a) Diastase activity (Schade scale) – in general, except baker's honey – honeys with low natural enzyme content (e.g. citrus honeys) and an HMF content of not more than 15 mg/kg	not less than 8 not less than 3
(b) HMF – in general, except baker's honey – honeys of declared origin from regions with a tropical climate and blends of these honeys	not more than 40 mg/kg (subject to the provisions of (a), second indent) not more than 80 mg/kg

Tips:

- Issues of honey composition are taken very seriously in Europe and have been reasons for import bans on third countries. Make sure you comply with the composition requirements set by the European Union.
- Communicate with your buyers about any specific requirements they might have beyond legislation.

Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) for antibiotics in honey

The European Union has set Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) for antibiotics in honey.

When you treat your bees with antibiotics, you have to make sure that residues of the antibiotics in your honey remain within certain limits.

The importance of compliance is shown by the ban of Chinese honey from the European Union market between 2002 and 2004. Frequent issues with residues of the prohibited antibiotic chloramphenicol in Chinese honey led to this ban.

The EU legislation on antibiotics residues is laid down in [Regulation \(EC\) 470/2009](#), in conjunction with [Regulation 37/2010](#).

Tips:

- Determine which antibiotics your beekeepers use and then refer to the Annex of Regulation 37/2010 to identify the corresponding MRLs.
- Send samples of your honey to a laboratory for analysis of antibiotics residues to determine if these residues are within the limits set by the European Union. If they are not, you must cooperate with beekeepers to change the antibiotics or lower their use.

Pesticide restriction for bee health

The European Union has decided to ban the pesticides clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam. This is because the use of certain pesticides in agriculture is leading

to massive decreases in bee colonies, also known as Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD).

More specifically, after extensive research by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the European Union's proposal targets pesticides used in the treatment of plants and cereals that are attractive to bees and pollinators.

Tips:

- See [Regulation 485/2013 on the ban of certain pesticides](#) for more information.
- Strict residue monitoring systems in the country of origin play a critical role in the protection of honey's positive image. See the section above concerning residue levels and the way to monitor residues in your honey.

2 . What additional requirements do buyers of honey and sweeteners often have?

European importers generally have stricter quality requirements than those prescribed by European Union legislation.

For example, honey importers often apply a maximum HMF (Hydroxymethylfurfural) content of around 10 for non-tropical honeys, instead of 40 as set by European Union legislation.

The initial low HMF content provides room for increases during transport, processing and the honey's shelf-life.

Non-legal requirements cover aspects of quality, environmental and social (labour) issues.

Certification of food safety management

In addition to stricter specifications than those laid down in European Union legislation, buyers often require you to have a certificate for a stringent food safety management system. The most important food safety management systems in Europe in order of importance are [ISO 22000](#), [BRC](#) and [IFS](#).

Tip:

- In [ITC's Standards Map](#) you can identify food safety management standards relevant to your product, review the main features of the selected standards and codes and compare standards' requirements side-by-side. You can also assess your own performance against these standards.

Documentation

European buyers appreciate detailed product and company documentation. Buyers generally require detailed Technical Data Sheets (TDS) and Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS). In addition, they will often send their suppliers a questionnaire with questions about the suppliers' setup (self-audit).

When sending your products to Europe, you will need to provide the European customs authorities with the following documents together with the shipment: health certificate (for honey), invoice for importer, commercial invoice for customs, bill of lading, packing list and certificate of origin.

Tips:

- Make sure you have a detailed Technical Data Sheet (TDS) and Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) with photos, information on origin and bibliographic references, where available.
- Depending on the country of origin, you might need to provide an export license to customs authorities in your own country.
- For more information on the relevant documents that you will need for customs in Europe, please refer to the [EU Export Helpdesk](#).

Representative samples

European buyers usually request samples to verify that your product meets their specifications, including all legislative requirements of the European Union. They analyse these samples in laboratories and will often share results with you when your product does not conform to expectations.

Analysis of samples will determine the suitability of your product for use in certain applications. Therefore, your sampling method must result in samples that represent what you can deliver in the quantities, quality and lead time as specified by the buyer in the contract following approval of the samples.

Tip:

- Always send representative samples of the product you can deliver according to the time frame, quantities and quality required by your buyer. First send a pre-shipment sample and wait for approval from the importer before you ship the order.

Payment and delivery terms

European buyers require strict compliance with contract terms. In addition to product specifications and prices, contracts usually also include payment and delivery terms.

Payment terms define risks of trade for you and your buyer. European buyers take fewer risks with new suppliers. They expect new suppliers to accept payment after delivery and inspection of the product.

Delivery terms define responsibility for arranging transport of your products to the buyer. European buyers specialised in imports often take responsibility for arranging transport from the port in your (neighbouring) country to their location. Buyers with a focus on other activities, such as processing, often leave this to you.

Tips:

- Take more risks and offer more attractive payment terms to new buyers than to existing buyers. Payment after receipt and inspection of products are most favourable for buyers. Payment in advance poses the most risk to the buyer.
- Familiarise yourself with [methods for payment in international trade](#), such as Letters of Credit.
- Familiarise yourself with the international delivery terms ([INCOTERMS](#)).

Kosher and Halal certification

Some European buyers require Kosher and/or Halal certification. Certification allows food manufacturers to use the ingredients in Kosher and Halal products. Although actual demand for Halal and Kosher products is small, demand for certification of

compliance with these religious standards is increasing. European buyers aim to prevent exclusion from respective markets.

Tip:

- Only obtain Kosher and Halal certificates when your buyers demand it. The certification procedure is usually short.

Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)

GAP is not obligatory for agricultural producers such as sugar cane growers, but compliance is recommended. Several definitions exist; these are generally a collection of principles for farm production and post-harvesting processes, with the aim of safe and healthy food.

Tip:

- For more information on compliance requirements, refer to the GAP standards at [Global G.A.P.](#) and the [FAO](#).

GMO-free certificates

The use of genetically modified crops and their derivatives is a very sensitive topic in Europe. The restriction on these products reflects concerns about food safety and environmental impact. European buyers generally do not want GMO products and often require a GMO-free certificate as proof that your product does not contain GMO constituents.

Tip:

- To reassure your buyers that your product is GMO-free, you can acquire a GMO-free certificate. If your product is organically certified, you will not need an additional certificate: organic certification already serves as a guarantee that the product is GMO-free.

3 . What are the requirements for niche markets?

In addition to requirements for successfully accessing the European honey and sweeteners market, complying with the following requirements could offer you a competitive advantage and make it easier to find a buyer.

Organic certification

A small but growing group of European buyers require third-party certification of sustainability. Organic certification in particular is gaining relevance.

To market your food product in the European Union as 'organic', you need to implement organic farming techniques and have your facilities audited by an accredited certifier. These requirements are specified in the [EU Regulation 834/2007](#).

Additionally, [new organic legislation](#) will be implemented in Europe in 2017. The objective of this new legislation is to simplify the old organic legislation. However, rules for organic production and testing will also become stricter. This could especially be a concern for exporters and producers from developing countries with different meteorological, environmental and structural conditions who try to comply with the rules made for European conditions.

Currently, the core requirements for organic beekeeping are as follows:

- Beehives must be positioned in an area with a radius of 3 km, which is free of contamination by chemicals (e.g. from an industrial complex, airport or main road).
- Crops on which the bees feed must not have been chemically treated.
- Artificial feed must carry organic certification.
- Diseases must not be treated with veterinary medicines, only with approved organic substances.
- Bees must not be stupefied while the honey is harvested.
- The hives should be made of natural materials.

Tips:

- Organic certification can provide access to interesting niche markets. However, be aware that few European buyers are willing to pay a significant price premium for organic food products.
- For a full overview of certification schemes in the sector, consult the ITC Standards Map.

Fairtrade certification

European consumers are increasingly concerned about the impact of their consumption patterns on working conditions of producers and local communities. Therefore, Fairtrade products are becoming increasingly popular in Europe. The notion of Fairtrade supports fair pricing and improved social conditions for producers and their communities.

If you aim to become Fairtrade certified, you will have to comply with the standards of Fairtrade International. One of the main requirements is to have a traceability system in place. See the website of Fairtrade International for the standards.

Tips:

- If you are considering acquiring a Fairtrade certificate, refer to the website of Fairtrade International for information on the standards for honey and cane sugar. For the certification requirements please refer to the website of FLOCert.
- Be aware that many of the environmental and social sustainability issues take place at farm level (which may not be a part of your company). Think about how to assure responsible business at the premises of your suppliers. To test to what extent your farmers are sustainable, you could ask them to fill in the Farmer Self-Assessment by the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative.
- For more information on available fair trade, organic and other certification standards for various products, please refer to the Standards Map of ITC. Although sweeteners such as palm sugar are not listed separately, standards for sugar in general are identified. The website also gives a quick-scan of the requirements of the different standards.

4 . What are the honey-specific requirements for niche markets?

Monofloral honeys

Monofloral honeys are produced by bees which collect their nectar mainly from one specific type of flower (e.g. Acacia). Through pollen analysis in a laboratory, you can determine whether a honey can be marketed as monofloral.

For many monofloral honeys, pollen from the main floral source must account for around 40% of the total pollen content. However, the minimum amount of pollen from the respective floral source depends on the type of flower, since different flowers produce different amounts of pollen.

Tips:

- If your bees gather their nectar largely from one type of flower, consider marketing your honey as a monofloral honey to fetch a potential price premium. Communicate with your buyer about the specific floral source of your honey and the respective region's characteristics to justify that your honey is monofloral.
- You can contact a laboratory to conduct a pollen analysis, but this might not be helpful since the technical analysis frequently has inconclusive results

5 . What are the sweetener-specific requirements for niche markets

Bonsucro

In response to the growing group of European buyers who require third-party sustainability certification, [Bonsucro](#) has developed a sustainability standard specifically for sugar.

Examples of the issues covered by the Bonsucro standard include respecting human rights and labour standards, active management of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and commitment to continuous improvement of key areas in the business.

Certification of compliance with the Bonsucro standard is particularly relevant when you supply sugar to the mainstream market. When you target specific segments of the market with an interest in sustainability, organic and Fairtrade certification are interesting alternatives.

Tip:

- Become a certified Bonsucro member by obtaining production and/or Chain of Custody certificates. Check the website of [Bonsucro](#) to understand the possibilities for membership as a supplier.

• 4) What is the demand?

After several years of increasing international honey prices, prices dropped sharply in the second half of 2015. The balance between supply and demand has shifted, and exporters will need to adapt their prices to this new market equilibrium. In terms of volumes, European demand for honey remains strong and importers continue to look for new suppliers.

1 . How much honey is imported into Europe?

European imports rising in volume

Europe is the second largest global producer of honey. However, it is not self-sufficient and is dependent on honey imports from other countries. In fact, around 40% of Europe's consumption needs are met through honey imports.

European imports of honey increased considerably between 2011 and 2015, amounting to more than 339,000 tonnes in 2015.

The continuous increase of European honey imports is mostly attributed to the substantial decrease of the European beekeeping sector, but is also the result of various problems related to major honey sources in previous years, such as droughts.

Germany is the largest honey importer, representing a share of 26% of the total volume of European imports, amounting to more than 88,000 tonnes in 2015.

The UK (12% of total imports), France (10%), Belgium (10%) and Spain (9%) are the other main European importers. Honey importers in these countries process the honey and sell it both domestically and abroad.

In the next five years, honey imports are expected to increase further in order to compensate for the continuous decline of the European production.

Tip:

- See our study about [trends for honey](#) for more information.

European imports significantly increased in value

Between 2010 and 2015 the honey prices on the international market saw a continuous rise, with prices for Mexican and Argentinean honey reaching USD 3,400/tonne FOB and sometimes even up to USD 4,000/tonne. As a result, the overall European imports increased by 11% in value.

The two main European importers of honey – Germany and the United Kingdom – experienced a significant increase in value of 11% and 6% respectively. Countries with an even higher increase of imports in value include Hungary (+88%), Croatia (+66%) and Bulgaria (+44%).

Since the end of 2015, international honey prices have been dropping considerably to levels below USD 2,500/tonne FOB for Mexican and Argentinean honey.

This decrease is caused by a combination of an increased supply from traditional honey producers, good harvests worldwide and strong stock positions, which have resulted in a balance shift between demand and supply.

As a result of the decreasing prices, honey stocks in South America became quite high as importers stopped buying in anticipation of further price drops and an increase of supply options.

Tips:

- Anticipate lower price offers from buyers in 2016 than in previous years.
- Work on price and cost reduction in the supply chain to remain price competitive in the new market situation with lower global market prices.
- Diversify your customer base to prevent dependence on a small number of buyers or just one market.

Interesting European markets

The markets of Germany, the UK and France account for around 50% of total European honey imports. Germany is the leading market, absorbing 26% of total imports.

It is interesting to note that imports are also increasingly directed to countries in Central and Eastern Europe. This development is mostly attributed to the shift of Ukrainian honey exports from Russia to the European Union. In fact, due to recent developments in relations between Ukraine and Russia, the European Union quadrupled imports of Ukrainian honey between 2011 and 2015.

To strengthen trade relations with Ukraine, the European Union currently allows importers to source 5,000 tonnes of honey on a duty-free basis. Because of geographical proximity, Ukrainian exports are largely directed to countries such as Poland, Romania and Bulgaria.

Tip:

- Honey markets in Eastern European countries (such as Poland and Romania) are small but rapidly growing, offering opportunities to developing country exporters. However, markets in such countries are subject to harsh competition from informal markets and supplies from Ukraine.

Opportunities for new suppliers

Honey imports from developing countries increased significantly between 2011 and 2015, amounting to 199,000 tonnes (€ 466 million) and representing 59% of total honey imports directed to Europe.

The largest supplier of honey to the European market is China, with imports amounting to more than 98,000 tonnes. Imports from China represent 29% of total honey imports directed to Europe. Chinese honey supplies are stable and sufficient, while the prices for honey are low because of low labour costs.

Despite some quality issues with Chinese honey (mostly concerning residues), China remains the largest supplier of honey to Europe.

Other large developing country suppliers include Mexico (7% share), Argentina (3%) and Brazil (2%).

It is important to note that until recently, Argentina was at the forefront of supplying honey to Europe and until 2010 was the second largest supplier of honey to Europe. However, bad climate conditions and GMO pollen in Argentinian honey have caused a decline in Argentinian supplies to Europe.

Tip:

- If you can provide GMO-free honey, take advantage of the low availability of honey with a GMO-free certificate from Argentina. Buyers who previously sourced in Argentina are generally looking for consistent quantities and competitive prices.

2 . How much honey is exported from Europe?

Continuous increase of European exports

During the period between 2011 and 2015, European honey exports increased substantially (8.5% annual increase), amounting to more than 162,000 tonnes in 2015.

The main destinations for European honey exports are other mature European markets, mainly in Western Europe. More specifically, the most important export destination for 2015 was Germany, absorbing 18% of the total European honey exports.

The second largest destination is France, with a market share of 17%. France re-exports a large share of its honey imports while consuming honey that is domestically produced.

Other major destinations for the European honey exports are Italy, Spain and Poland. An interesting trend is the gradual shift of the exports towards countries in Eastern Europe. In fact, between 2011 and 2015 there was a substantial increase in the honey volume absorbed by Eastern European countries such as Romania (19% annual increase), Bulgaria (35%) and Hungary (66%).

Tip:

- Germany and France are honey trade hubs. Consequently, you will find most big honey importers and processors in these countries. Please refer to the website of [FEEDM \(European Federation of Honey Packers & Distributors\)](#) where you can look for national beekeepers associations for these countries and search for potential buyers.

3 . How much honey is produced in Europe?

Production data for the European Member States were extracted from FAOSTAT. Since data is not available for 2014 or 2015, the data extraction and the analysis is based on data from the years 2009, 2011 and 2013.

Decreasing beekeeping sector

In the last few years, Europe has produced around 234,000 tons of honey per year (*Source: European Commission, 2016*). Between 2009 and 2013 European honey production fluctuated somewhat, resulting in an almost equal production in 2013 as in 2009, amounting to 209,000 tonnes.

The decline in European production between 2011 and 2013 was mainly attributed to production decreases in Germany and Spain. However, production in other major European honey sources such as Romania, Hungary and Poland was also under pressure.

The decrease in European production was mostly attributed to the decrease in bee colonies, which was largely the result of bee diseases and intensive use of chemicals in agriculture that are deadly for bees.

Since 2013, the amount of colonies has been stabilising. However, the threat of declining populations of bees is still a major concern as intensification of agriculture and use of pesticides continues. See our study on [trends for honey](#) for more information.

Tip:

- The pressure on European honey production means that more opportunities will emerge for developing country exporters. Being able to guarantee a consistent quantity of honey will be essential for cooperation with European honey buyers.

4 . How much honey is consumed in Europe?

Apparent consumption was calculated using the formula: apparent consumption = production + imports – exports. Production data were extracted from FAOSTAT for the period 2009-2013. Import and export data were extracted from Eurostat for the period 2009-2013.

Stabilisation of honey consumption

Europe is the largest global consumer of honey, being responsible for more than 20% of the total global consumption. China, the US and Turkey are the other major global honey consumers.

Between 2009 and 2013, consumption remained stable despite increasing prices on the global market. Apparent consumption only fluctuated slightly, amounting to almost 362,000 tonnes in 2013. After an increase in consumption between 2009 and 2011, European honey consumption decreased slightly between 2011 and 2013.

Germany is the leading market for honey, representing 23% of total European honey consumption (around 85,000 tonnes). Other major consumers of honey in Europe are the UK (12% of total European consumption), France (10%), Spain (8%) and Poland (7%)

According to figures on growth rates of apparent consumption, the fastest growing consumption markets in the period 2009-2013 were Ireland (+26% annually), Latvia (+22% annually), Romania (+15% annually), Croatia (+14% annually), Estonia (+11% annually) and Malta (+11% annually).

Tips:

- Honey markets in Western Europe are the largest, and honey consumption is expected to remain high. These markets also offer the most opportunities for developing country exporters of niche honeys such as monofloral, organic and Fairtrade. See our study on [trends for honey](#) for more information.
- Target your promotional efforts at the fast-growing Central and Eastern European markets as well. These markets offer more room for new suppliers and thus great opportunities for developing country exporters.