



## PRESS RELEASE

### World Bee Day: a review of bees, beekeeping and European honey

Brussels, 18 May 2026

**In the run-up to World Bee Day on 20<sup>th</sup> May, the picture is clear. The market of European honey is under pressure. The European Union covers only around 60% of its honey demand, while 46% of imported honey samples analysed were suspected to not be -compliant with the Honey Directive. Together, these figures highlight the urgency of better understanding, protecting and valuing European beekeeping.**

Behind these figures lies a reality that is often oversimplified: without healthy bees, sufficient nectar and pollen resources, and a favourable environment, there can be neither viable beekeeping nor high-quality honey. This reality needs to be better understood, particularly in Belgium, where European honey sits at the intersection of production, traceability, biodiversity and consumption.

It is against this backdrop that BeeLife is launching [EUBeeLovers](#), a three-year awareness campaign co-funded by the European Union, set to become a reference source of information on European honey, bees and beekeeping. A first key moment will take place on 27<sup>th</sup> May in Brussels, with a press conference and seminar dedicated to these challenges, bringing together high-level experts to explore the issues in greater depth.

#### A beekeeping sector under pressure

For beekeepers, the health of colonies, access to nectar and pollen resources, and the quality of hive products are not abstract concerns: they are the economic foundation of their activity, in the same way soil fertility underpins crop farming and animal health underpins livestock production.

Yet beekeepers do not always control the environment in which their bees evolve. Agricultural practices, availability of floral resources, pesticide use, continuity of flowering periods and landscape quality all directly influence colony health and production conditions. A depleted environment — characterised by low floral diversity, monocultures or a lack of landscape features — can force beekeepers to feed colonies more frequently, move them more often, or face lower yields and increased mortality.

When the above variable become unbalanced, the consequences are tangible: physiological stress in bees, colony losses, additional costs for feeding or replacing hives, risks of contamination in hive products, reduced market access and declining consumer trust.

“As we too often forget, beekeeping is an integral part of the agricultural ecosystem. Without the daily work of beekeepers to maintain healthy colonies, we not only lose high-quality European honey, but also the engine of pollination on which our agriculture and ecosystems depend,” warns Anna Ganapini, President of BeeLife.

#### A European market under pressure from price and fraud

Alongside production fragility, the European honey market faces strong commercial pressure. According to the *European Honey Market report*<sup>1</sup> published in 2025:

- The EU produced around 286,000 tonnes of honey in 2022, covering only 60% of its needs and relying heavily on imports, 36% of which came from China.

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<sup>1</sup> [European Honey Market | EU Pollinator Hub](#)



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- At the same time, European beekeepers are facing rising production costs, including a 62% increase in feeding costs for colonies between 2021 and 2023.
- At the other end of the market, pressure remains significant. An audit of the Walloon beekeeping sector highlights that China recorded the lowest import price into the European Union in 2024, at €1.30/kg. By comparison, locally produced honey in Wallonia and Brussels reached a retail price of €16.87/kg in 2025. While import and retail prices are not directly comparable, this gap illustrates the structural pressure exerted by very low-cost honey on European producers.
- Fraud also remains a major concern: 46% of imported honey samples<sup>2</sup> from non-EU countries analysed were suspected of non-compliance with the Honey Directive, including adulteration or mislabelling practices.
- Some fraudulent honeys are associated with prices as low as €1.40/kg, undermining fair competition and placing further pressure on European beekeepers.

In this context, European honey cannot be reduced to a simple price comparison. Its value lies in its origin, traceability and authenticity, but also in the conditions that make its production possible. Choosing European honey means supporting a model that depends on healthy colonies, a favourable environment and a market capable of recognising the work of beekeepers. *“Every consumer has the power to make a difference by checking labels and choosing honey that is 100% harvested within the European Union,”* reminds Anna Ganapini.

### **Belgium: a honey hub with fragile production**

Belgium holds a paradoxical position in the honey market. The country currently counts 11,300 registered beekeepers with the FASFC, mainly in Flanders (6,493) and Wallonia (4,807), a number that has been steadily increasing for over a decade.

However, this growth should not obscure the sector’s fragility. According to the FASFC, 31.2% of monitored bee colonies did not survive between autumn 2023 and summer 2024, compared with 27.2% in the previous period. The varroa mite — a parasite that weakens and infects bee colonies — remains the main cause of mortality, followed by the Asian hornet.

On the production side, Belgium remains a small producer at European level. According to a recent audit<sup>3</sup>, it produced around 2,700 tonnes of honey, while annual domestic consumption was estimated at 5,073 tonnes in 2022–2023. The country also imports significant volumes of honey, much of which is subsequently re-exported, confirming its role as a hub in the European honey trade.

This situation makes questions of origin, quality and traceability even more central. In 2024, among the main non-EU sources of honey imported into Belgium, China, Ukraine and Argentina ranked highest. China alone accounted for 19,748 tonnes of honey imported into Belgium, representing nearly one third of EU honey imports originating from China.

### **Bees at the heart of agriculture and ecosystems**

The importance of bees extends far beyond honey production. Pollinators play a vital role in biodiversity and agricultural productivity.

“In Belgium, the overall impact of pollinator decline can be masked by strong cereal and potato production. However, the reality is alarming for fruit and vegetable crops. In practical terms, without bees, iconic Belgian products such as genuine Liège syrup or regional apple juices would need to be

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<sup>2</sup> [Honey \(2021-2022\) - Food Safety - European Commission](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Audit-secteur-apicole-2025-Final.pdf](#)



made from imported fruit. This is not only an environmental issue — it is the loss of an agricultural identity,” warns Noa Simón Delso, Scientific Director at BeeLife.

She adds: “Restoring ecosystems and protecting pollinators requires a coherent approach: reducing chemical pressures, improving habitats, better integrating pollinators into agricultural policies, and providing concrete support to farmers and beekeepers who contribute to these balances.”

### **Preserving what bees make possible**

On World Bee Day, protecting bees is not only about safeguarding a species that is widely appreciated by the public. It also means preserving a sector, a body of expertise, a high-quality food product and a key pillar of European agriculture.

It is in this spirit that the EUBeeLovers campaign has been developed, co-funded by the European Union and implemented in Belgium by BeeLife. It aims to improve understanding of the value of European honey, the role of beekeepers, and the conditions required for viable beekeeping. These issues will be further explored on 27<sup>th</sup> May in Brussels during a press conference and seminar bringing together experts on European honey, beekeeping, biodiversity, agricultural policy and market challenges.

### **About BeeLife**

BeeLife European Beekeeping Coordination is a European organisation dedicated to the protection of bees, pollinators and agriculture within the European Union. Through research, advocacy and collaboration, BeeLife works towards an environment in which pollinators can thrive, contributing to European biodiversity and food security.

### **About the EUBeeLovers campaign**

EUBeeLovers is a three-year communication and awareness campaign co-funded by the European Union and coordinated by BeeLife European Beekeeping Coordination. Running in Belgium from 2026 to 2028, it aims to raise awareness of the value of European honey, its traceability, diversity and quality, as well as the essential role of bees and beekeepers in biodiversity, pollination and resilient food systems.

The campaign will deploy its messages through a range of initiatives, including an annual press conference, thematic seminars, a dedicated [website](#) designed to become a reference source for journalists and stakeholders, and awareness campaigns, including radio outreach.

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