infographic 4

Practices for Beekeepers in the EU

Consumption of local honey

Advantages: The Comprehensive Guide

Honey has been part of human nutrition since prehistory, and it's a product deeply embedded in the food traditions of human communities worldwide.

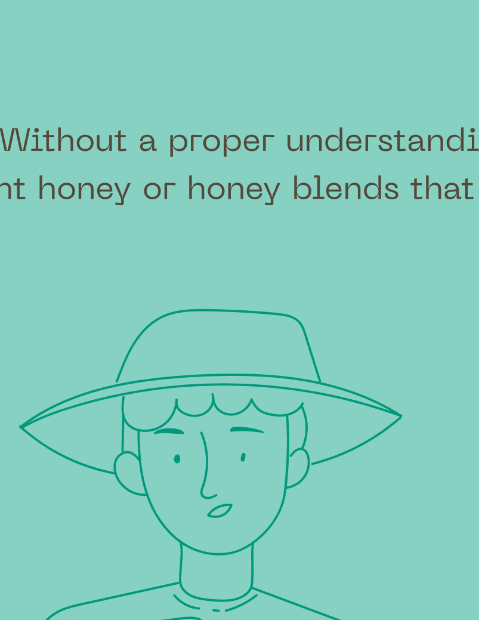
Thanks to this long history of flavour and production techniques, in constant balance with the population of honeybees, honey represents a product with extraordinary properties and values:

- Genuineness
- A direct connection to the landscape and its flowers
- A wide and local variety of aromas and tastes

All these aspects need to be considered when we buy honey. Without a proper understanding of the product and its origins puts us at risk of buying fraudulent honey or honey blends that do not reflect the aromatic and pollinic variance expected.

To access honey's true organoleptic properties and make an informed choice that supports the preservation of local biodiversity, it is essential to have a clear guide for consumers.

We aim to help you find the honey that matches your purchasing motivations. We clarify below the advantages of consuming honey – for our taste, local economy and region's biodiversity, and also emphasise the importance of knowing the specific origins of the honey.



1

UNIQUE FLAVOURS OF HONEY, LOCAL HONEY AND PGI/PDO HONEY

Honey is far more than a simple sweetener. Choosing to consume local honey brings a wealth of benefits that extend beyond basic nutrition. Unlike the standardised, uniform products of large corporations, each locally crafted honey embodies the essence of its region, its biodiversity, and the craftsmanship of local beekeepers, creating an unparalleled tasting experience and an authentically beneficial product.

Regarding quality and hygiene, local honey– produced by beekeepers – offers superior traceability and purity, as small-scale producers are often committed to providing an unadulterated product free from industrial processing. In terms of identity, each local honey tells the story of its terroir, varying according to the flora pollinated and offering a delightful range of flavours, textures, and nuances that set it apart from mass-produced, standardised varieties.

Local honey offers an unparalleled tasting experience, capturing the diverse floral landscapes and seasonal variations. Each jar of local honey reflects the specific flowers pollinated by bees in that region, creating a unique flavour profile that changes from one area to another and even from season to season. Unlike some industrial honey blends, mixed to achieve a "standard" taste — local honey embodies the essence of its environment, offering a range of aromas, colours, and flavours as varied as the landscapes from which they come.

This diversity of taste and texture is what makes local honey so exceptional. From the light, floral notes of acacia honey to the deep, earthy tones of buckwheat, each type of honey tells the story of the region's flora and the hard work of its beekeepers. By supporting local producers, consumers are rewarded with an authentic, multi-dimensional tasting experience.

Moreover, this lack of standardisation is a celebration of nature's diversity, offering honey connoisseurs the chance to explore complex and nuanced flavours that reflect the true character of each local area. Choosing local honey means choosing an adventure in flavour, one that honours the uniqueness of each harvest and connects us more closely to the landscape and its floral diversity.

If you are travelling or living in a country which has a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) or Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) for honey (see Logo), it is for you the opportunity to discover a special product. Several countries in Europe have these quality schemes for their agricultural products. For honey, you can find, for example, "MIEL VILLUERCAS-IBORES" (DOP) in Spain, "Miel de Lavande de Provence" (IGP) in France, "Miele delle Dolomiti Bellunesi" (DOP) in Italy, "Mel da Terra Quente" (DOP) in Portugal or "Miód kurpiowski" (PGI) in Poland. This local honey may be more expensive but has stricter rules of production and controls and you are 100% sure to support local beekeepers, enterprises and flora.

PGI and PDO Logo used to value the local origin of the product. These quality labels protect and promote the origins, traditions and unique characteristics of many distinctive EU products, including honey (and honey wine)

Local honey is typically more flavorful because it reflects the diversity of flora in your area. Depending on the plants the bees pollinate, honey can have unique tastes and qualities that mass-produced honey often lacks. If you usually don't like honey, you can be surprised by the flavour variance of local honey and if you travel around, get some honey from other places, and you will discover a whole new world of flavours and aromas.

2

MULTIPLE USE AND VERSATILITY

Honey has the advantage of being used on its own, offering a spoonful of goodness that reveals more or less persistent aftertastes in addition to its sweetness. It can also be paired with other foods.

The word "honey" actually refers to various flavours and combinations, each of which can accompany the preparation of drinks, desserts, dishes with rice, meat, vegetables, and much more.

This versatile character is increasingly being explored in both restaurants and the homes of cooking enthusiasts, in addition to being a key ingredient in the confectionery industry for many years.

Honey is not only a product to be used in herbal teas or on bread; it is also an unexpected and refined resource for those who want to impress in the kitchen, those who love traditional desserts, and those who wish to explore new flavour pairings.

The versatility of honey is also determined by its consistency. The ability to work with both liquid and crystallised honey in cooking allows for experimenting with different tactile sensations in the mouth, as well as various flavours, without the product undergoing artificial food treatments to achieve its different consistencies.

Local honey is unique because it embodies the specific flavors of its territory.

3

ECO FRIENDLY

When selecting local honey, consumers are making a choice that supports environmental sustainability in several impactful ways. Local honey minimises the impact of massive packaging on the environment and reduces the carbon footprint tied to long-distance transport. Keeping honey production and distribution local reduces reliance on fossil fuels, supporting a more sustainable and community-focused food system.

Local beekeepers are often devoted to ecologically sound practices, prioritising the health and natural cycles of their bee colonies. Through these methods, local beekeepers foster sustainable practices that respect the environment and contribute positively to the ecosystem in our surroundings. Not only will their bees pollinate the crops and nature of our closest environment, ensuring food production and rich and diversified ecosystems, but they will also help us identify environmental threats that can affect us all, such as the invasion of invasive species (e.g., hornets) or the use of dangerous pesticides. Choosing local beekeepers as a honey purchase option helps the prosperity of a sector able to give us a prompt alarm about environmental health and maintain their sentinel role for public health.

Beyond honey, local bees are crucial in pollinating nearby crops and wild plants, supporting agricultural production, health, and environmental stability. By choosing local honey, consumers help protect these vital pollinators and encourage biodiversity within their region. This decision to purchase local honey extends beyond personal consumption—it's a step toward nurturing a more balanced, eco-conscious world.

Local honey has a smaller carbon footprint since it doesn't require long-distance transportation. Additionally, local honey production is often more sustainable, as smaller-scale beekeepers are likelier to use practices that protect bees and the environment.

4

SUPPORTING LOCAL BEEKEEPERS

From an economic perspective, purchasing locally sourced honey directly supports beekeepers in our community, ensuring the sustainability of their profession and strengthening the local economic fabric.

Buying honey from local beekeepers is more than just a purchase—it's a commitment to preserving traditions and valuing the rich heritage of beekeeping. Local apiculture often follows methods passed down through generations, rooted in respect for nature and a deep understanding of bee ecosystems. This connection to tradition ensures the production of high-quality, authentic honey but also helps safeguard the intricate relationships between bees, plants, and the surrounding environment.

Local beekeepers play a vital role in the broader economy, contributing to a diverse market where consumers can access an array of unique and flavorful honey varieties. Local honey reflects the richness of the region's flora and offers a pure product. By supporting these artisans, we encourage a market that values quality, authenticity, and ecological responsibility.

Moreover, beekeepers are guardians of biodiversity. Their practices support the pollination of local crops and wild plants, which is essential for agricultural health and maintaining ecological balance. Every jar of local honey purchased is a vote for sustainable practices and a commitment to keeping these invaluable traditions alive while enhancing our consumers' choices with authentic, high-quality honey.

By consuming local honey, you support local beekeepers, promote sustainable beekeeping practices, and pollinate local plants and crops. This helps maintain local bee populations, which is crucial for pollination and biodiversity in your area. Additionally, you help the local economy, from which you may also benefit.

5

HONEY DURATION

Honey is a living product that will evolve over the years. It has to be stored properly by the beekeepers, the packers, the retailers and the consumers to preserve its intrinsic properties.

Once in your kitchen, honey should be stored in a dry and dark place at the right temperature (below 20°C). Its specific constitution could give honey (almost) an endless life in the right storage conditions.

It's a remarkable property for a "natural" food that does not require pasteurisation of food preservatives.

The explanation is in the process of transforming nectar into honey. Bees use their enzymes to break down complex sugars into simple sugars. The oxidation-reduction reaction of glucose generates what we commonly call hydrogen peroxide. It is precisely hydrogen peroxide, the high sugar concentration, and the acidity that make honey inhospitable to moulds and bacteria.

To ensure optimal storage conditions, choosing a short supply chain is advisable: buying honey from local beekeepers and avoiding temperature fluctuations and exposure to light, which can spoil or reduce honey's aromatic properties.

To enjoy its organoleptic properties over time, consumers should also be informed about the correct storage of their honey, just as beekeepers should be.

6

NATURAL ASPECTS

The sweetness of honey conceals many elements that make it more "natural" than refined sugars. Honey also contains pollen, which gives it unique properties. Some studies have pointed to a reduction in the risk of allergy.

Choosing honey from local beekeeping companies allows one to taste honey with richer organoleptic aspects, avoiding the risk of buying honey without pollinic components (removing the pollen is a practice that fraudulent people can use to hide the origin of the honey).

Local and small honey producers only proceed with sieving, guaranteeing their honey's integrity from real beehives. The pollen content is not altered.

The naturality of honey is due to its production process: beekeepers harvest and extract the surplus honey produced by the honey bees and stored it in the honey chamber. Honey can be used directly for human consumption and packed after the extraction from the combs built by the bees.

Therefore, honey is one of the few foods ready for human consumption without an intermediate process. It can be consumed as it is in the hive. That is why you can find comb honey on the market.

There is much literature on the beneficial properties of honey, but honey is also food and, like other hive products, has been known and used since ancient times for its special properties. Beehive products, including honey, also have a key role in cosmetics, but beyond these aspects, we recommend discovering its genuineness, goodness and variety. Honey deserves to be tasted, not necessarily as a dietary supplement or cough syrup.

Consuming local honey allows you to enjoy a more natural product because local beekeepers typically produce it. Local honey is often only sieved to remove larger particles, preserving its natural properties, including its pollen content. This ensures that the honey you consume is closer to its original form without the need for artificial additives or extensive processing.

Find your neighbouring beekeeper or a shop that sells local honey and check the label!

Want to know more about honey?
We have two infographic guides:

Consumption of Local Honey: Reading honey labels

Choose the quick edition for a fast summary

Consumption of local honey: Advantages at a Glance

What is B-THENET?

B-THENET is the first EU thematic network for sustainable beekeeping.

B-THENET brings together different actors and their expertise to co-create and share knowledge to find applicable solutions for EU beekeepers.

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