

The European market potential for certified honey

Last updated:

10 October 2024

Sustainability is becoming increasingly important on the European honey market. Governments' procurement policies to ensure product authenticity and traceability in Europe have also added to the demand for certified honey. This makes Europe, particularly Western Europe, the most important market for certified honey in the world.

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1. Product description

There are several types of honey that can be classified according to their origin/source (e.g. blossom honey or honeydew honey) and their mode of production and/or presentation (e.g. comb honey, chunk honey, drained honey, extracted honey, pressed honey, filtered honey). However, in terms of international trade all honey types fall under the same HS code 040900 for *Natural Honey*.

In the world of honey production, certified honey is a significant yet small segment. Certified honey refers to honey that has met the standards of a certification scheme related to environmental and social aspects, and that has been certified by a certification body.

This certification process offers several key benefits. Firstly, it enhances the credibility of the honey, making it more appealing to both consumers and importers who prioritise quality and safety. Certified honey is also often perceived as a premium product, allowing exporters to set higher prices and differentiate their range in a crowded market.

Sustainability certification schemes

The table below presents most certifications found on the European market. The EU Organic and Fairtrade International certifications are the most commonly used. Organic honey refers to honey produced naturally, without the use of chemical substances during production and processing. Fair trade honey, on the other hand, refers to honey traded under conditions that are favourable to honey exporters such as fair prices.

Table 1: Common certifications for honey in Europe

Standard Name	Brief Description	Certification Logo
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EU Organic	Certification for products that meet the organic standards set by the European Union in regulations EC 834/2007 and EU 2021/1165 .	✘ Source: European Commission , 2018
Fairtrade International	Ensures fair trading conditions for farmers in developing countries, prioritising their economic welfare. Each purchase contributes to the Fairtrade premium, in which beekeepers can invest through their businesses or community initiatives.	✘ ✘ Source: Fairtrade , 2024
Fair for life	Certification focusing on fair trade and responsible supply chains. Promotes respect for human rights and fair labour conditions and supports biodiversity and sustainable agricultural practices.	✘ Source: Fair for Life , 2024
Demeter Biodynamic	Certification for biodynamic farming, which is a form of sustainable agriculture based on regenerative and holistic principles . It has higher and stricter standards than organic.	✘ Source: Demeter , 2024
Soil Association	Organic certification promoting sustainable, environmentally-friendly farming and animal welfare. This is the organic label in the UK.	✘ Source: Soil Association , 2024
Naturland (Fair)	German certification for organic agricultural products and aquaculture, focusing on sustainable practices. Naturland also offers a fair trade certification, combining in essence organic farming, social responsibility and fair trade.	✘ ✘ Source: Naturland , 2024
True Source Certified	Certification ensuring the traceability and ethical origin of honey. It enhances transparency within the entire honey supply chain.	✘ Source: True Source Honey , 2024

Geographical Indication	Certification that protects the name of a product that originates from a specific region recognised for producing high-quality honey.	✘ Source: European Commission, 2018
Unique Manuka Factor (UMF™)	Certification specifically for New Zealand Manuka honey, assessing its unique properties. It protects the term 'manuka honey' via stringent quality testing.	✘ Source: Unique Manuka Factor, 2024

Source: ProFound, 2024

Certification standards all have their own guidelines and requirements. They show whether the various actors in a supply chain meet the environmental, social and other standards. [In addition, certified honey is tested for several key quality markers](#) such as purity, absence of additives, moisture levels, acidity and clarity. These tests are crucial for maintaining a consistently superior taste and quality.

2. What makes Europe an interesting market for certified honey?

Europe is an interesting market for certified honey as it is one of the world's largest markets for organic and fair trade food. This fact, combined with high honey consumption and large regular honey imports, suggests a positive outlook for certified honey. This represents an important opportunity for exporters in emerging market economies, where a large share of European honey imports comes from

The strong demand for honey in Europe indicates a stable demand for certified honey

No specific trade data are available for certified honey. However, the strong demand for regular honey indicates a robust market and is a good indicator of the potential for certified honey, given the recognised consumer preference for high quality, safe and sustainably-sourced products. The existing import infrastructure and established consumer base provide a reliable base for certified honey, which may be further favoured by its additional guarantees of quality and ethical production.

Europe is the world's largest honey importer, accounting for 48% of global honey imports. Over the last decade, European honey imports have increased. In 2020, the volume of imported honey reached an all-time high of more than 383,000 tonnes, but from 2021 onwards there was a slight decline. This is linked to the fall in honey exports from Ukraine, Europe's second largest honey supplier, where [production collapsed because of the war](#). In 2023, imports increased again, reaching a total volume of 360,208 tonnes of honey imported, worth €986 billion. The average annual growth is estimated at only 0.7% between 2019 and 2023.

Source: ITC Trade Map, 2024

Despite these recent fluctuations, the figure below shows that imports have remained relatively stable at around 350,000 tonnes. This behaviour indicates a stable and considerable demand for honey in Europe. According to our own calculations, this stability in honey imports will continue in the coming years. As such, Europe will remain an important market for honey, offering good opportunities for exporters of both regular and certified honey.

Source: ITC Trade Map, 2024

Large volumes of honey imports from emerging economies create opportunities for certified honey exporters

A significant share of European honey imports comes from emerging market economies. In 2019, the value of European imports from emerging market economies reached €375 million, representing 41% of the total import value. By 2023, this share increased to 43%, with a total value of €424 million. This represents an average growth of 3.1% per year in the period 2019-2023.

Despite a decrease in the total value of European imports in 2023, the share of honey imported from these countries remains considerable. The high European demand for honey from emerging economies suggests a market receptive to diverse honey sources and offers opportunities for exporters from these origins who can certify their honey.

Source: ITC Trade Map, 2024

China and Ukraine are the major suppliers to the European market. These countries cover 44% of honey imports in volume and 25% in value. China holds a 29% share in volume and 14% share in value of total European imports, but it is not the main source of certified honey. Ukraine also has a large share in European imports, accounting for 11% of imported value and 15% of imported volume. Ukrainian exports of organic honey have increased substantially in recent years, [reaching 703 tonnes in 2023](#). Other large suppliers include Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, which stand out for their production of certified honey and fill this niche to a greater extent.

Competition in the honey market is fierce, especially in the lower-quality and higher-volume segment. This makes it even more important for suppliers to know the specifics of their product, and market it well, allowing for better opportunities to enter the higher-value market.

Europe's status as one of the world's largest honey consumers highlights potential for certified honey

The EU is the [second largest honey producer in the world after China](#), producing 286,000 tonnes of honey in 2022. Still, European demand for honey is larger than its own production. Europe [only covers 63% of its honey needs](#) and, as a result, imports large volumes of honey from non-EU countries.

European honey apparent consumption is estimated at 436,509 tonnes in 2022. [European average per capita consumption of 0.99 kg](#) highly exceeds average global consumption (0.23 kg per year). In 2022, Greece was the second-largest honey consumer in the world with 2.46 kg per person, only after the Central African Republic.

The high level of consumption indicates a strong demand for honey and reflects a market that values honey as a staple food. This offers many opportunities for certified honey to meet the preferences of health and ethically-conscious consumers.

Resilience of organic food market will drive demand for certified honey in Europe

Europe is the [second largest organic food market in the world](#), after North America. In 2023, Europe dominated almost 40% of the world's organic retail sales. 7 out of the top ten markets in terms of organic retail sales are European and include Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy and the United Kingdom. Europe has the world's second highest average of organic per capita consumption, estimated at 103 euro/person in 2022. This reflects a consumer base that values and seeks organic certification, creating a significant opportunity for organic honey suppliers.

Organic retail sales in Europe have been steadily increasing, growing at an annual average rate of 6.4% between 2018 and 2022. In 2022, there was a slight decrease of -2.2% compared to 2021, which is partly explained by the economic crisis and high inflation that resulted in high living costs. Organic food, often more expensive than the alternative, has been impacted by changing consumer behaviour, but remains resilient. The drop in inflation in most countries suggests a positive scenario for organic retail sales in the nearly future.

European consumer demand for organic products is also reflected in the number of European organic importers, which has increased significantly over the past decades. In 2022, there were [7,272 European importers handling organic produce](#), corresponding to a 32% growth compared to 2018 (5,507 importers). This trend reflects a well-developed infrastructure for the distribution and marketing of certified products, which facilitates market entry and growth of certified honey suppliers.

Source: FiBL Statistics, 2024

Among other food products, there is a [strong demand in EU countries for organic certified honey](#), as it remains one of very few totally natural and unaltered foods available to consumers. This demand is reflected in growing imports of organic honey. In 2022, [9.2% of the imported honey was organic](#). This was one of the highest organic import shares in Europe. Moreover, honey was one of the few organic products whose imports increased between 2021 and 2022.

Tips:

Read more about the general developments in certification in the honey market in [our study on European market demand](#).

Read [Apiservices reports](#) for more information about statistics and emerging trends in the honey market.

Refer to the website of the [Research Institute of Organic Agriculture \(FiBL\)](#) to learn more about the organic markets in Europe.

3. Which European countries offer the most opportunities for certified honey?

The countries that offer the most opportunities for certified honey are Germany, UK, France, Poland, Belgium and Spain. These countries all show a strong demand for honey, have high consumption, and relatively large organic and fair trade food markets. An important share of actors in these markets value certification, opening doors for exporters who meet these standards.

Source: ITC Trade Map, 2024

Germany

Germany is the largest producer of honey in Europe. In 2022, Germany produced 34,100 tonnes of honey, accounting for 12% of the total European production. Germany is also the largest consumer of honey in Europe, with an apparent consumption of almost 67,540 tonnes in 2022. German [per capita consumption amounted to 0.81 kg per person](#) per year. Despite its high production, Germany highly depends on imports to satisfy its demand for honey.

In 2023, Germany imported 64,425 tonnes of honey, representing 18% of total European imports. German import volumes have shown a steady fall of -5.9% on average per year since 2019. However, own calculations predict an average annual growth of 2.6% between 2024 and 2028.

Germany stands out as the largest European importer from emerging economies, with 45,058 tonnes in 2023. German honey imports from emerging economies have declined on average by -7.3% per year, which is in line with the total decline in imports. Still, the share of non-EU countries supplying Germany has remained relatively stable, with around 70% of total imports since 2019. The main suppliers of honey to Germany are Ukraine, Argentina, Mexico and China. German imports from non-EU suppliers are fairly divided between different supplying countries, which indicates this market is not highly concentrated or dominated by a specific supplier.

Germany is the [world's second largest market in terms of organic retail sales](#), with €15 billion in 2022. It is also the largest European market for organic food products in general. In 2023, organic retail sales accounted for 6.3% of all retail sales in Germany, which is the sixth largest share worldwide. In 2023, organic retail per capita reached €181 per person.

Over the last 5 years, organic retail sales in Germany increased significantly at an average annual rate of 8.8%. German consumer demand for organic products is clear from the many organic food processors and importers operating in the country. In fact, Germany has the largest number of organic importers in Europe and the second largest number of organic processors, with 1,944 and 21,981 respectively. This number accounts for 25% of total European organic food processors.

Organic honey has also grown in popularity, mainly due to environmental concerns coupled with an increasingly healthy lifestyle amongst German consumers. Organic honey must be accompanied by an organic label or certification, otherwise it will not be accepted. [Walter Lang](#) is one of the most important German players in the honey sector. The company handles a broad portfolio of European and non-European honeys. Walter Lang offers a wide range of organic honeys that the company imports from partners in several origins, mainly in Central and South America.

Germany is also an interesting market for fair trade products. In 2023, [sales of Fairtrade products in Germany rose by 8.5% to €2.6 billion](#), and per capita sales exceeded €30 for the first time. This shows that consumers remain loyal to Fairtrade even in times of inflation and financial uncertainty. In the case of honey, the volume of sales has increased significantly over the last ten years. In 2023, 883 tonnes of honey were sold in Germany under Fairtrade certification alone, with a [total turnover of €10.1 million](#). It is estimated that around [7.1% of these Fairtrade honey sales were also organic](#). While there has been a decline in sales since 2020, mainly due to the high cost of living and lower consumer purchasing power, the [slight recovery of the German economy in early 2024 and the expected easing of inflation](#) may boost sales forecasts for the coming years.

An example of a German company that imports fair trade honey from non-EU countries is [Breitsamer Honig](#). This company has suppliers in South and Central America, specifically Chile, Guatemala, Mexico and Uruguay.

Source: [Statista](#), 2023

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom is the second largest European market for honey, after Germany. In 2022, this country had an estimated apparent consumption of 59,055 tonnes and a [per capita consumption of 0.87 kg per person](#). The UK is not a major producer of honey, [producing only 14% of the honey consumed](#) by the domestic market.

The UK highly depends on imports to satisfy its demand for honey, which creates several opportunities for suppliers. In 2023, the UK was the second largest European importer of honey with 50,917 tonnes worth €103 million. The UK's imported volumes registered a significant average growth of 14% per year since 2019. Imports

are expected to increase in the coming years, at an average growth rate of 3.1% per year until 2028.

The UK is also the second largest European importer of honey from emerging economies. The share of imports from non-EU countries is growing. In 2023, the UK imported nearly 44,718 tonnes of honey from non-EU suppliers, which accounted for 88% of total honey imports. This share exceeds the 83% share of non-EU countries supplying the UK in 2019. The main non-EU supplier to the UK is China, followed by Mexico, Vietnam, Brazil and Turkey. China dominates almost all of UK imports (88%), leaving a reduced space for which other supplying countries can compete.

In addition, the UK is Europe's fifth largest market for organic food overall. In 2022, the value of organic retail sales in the UK was €3.4 billion. In the same year, per capita retail sales of organic products reached €51 per person. Over the last 5 years, retail sales of organic products in the UK have grown significantly at an average annual rate of 7.7%. In fact, [2021 was the tenth consecutive year of growth](#). All food and drink sectors showed good performance and resilience, with online sales performing particularly well.

Source: [FiBL Statistics](#), 2024

The market for Fairtrade products was similar. Despite the cost-of-living crisis and unprecedented levels of inflation, volume sales of Fairtrade products grew. [Fairtrade honey sales increased by 19%](#) between 2021 and 2022. Increased consumer focus on health and wellness in the UK is driving demand for certified honey and [further growth in value retail sales is expected for the coming year](#).

[De Traay](#) is a major player in the UK with a broad portfolio of conventional, organic and Fairtrade honeys. De Traay currently offers both organic and Fairtrade certified honey sourced from Nicaragua.

France

France is the second largest producer of honey in Europe. In 2022, France produced 31,400 tonnes of honey, accounting for 11% of total European production. France is also the third largest consumer of honey in Europe, with an apparent consumption of 50,288 tonnes in 2022. [Per capita consumption amounted to 0.78 kg per person](#) per year.

France highly depends on imports to satisfy its demand for honey. In 2023, France imported 31,314 tonnes of honey, representing 8.7% of total European imports. French import volumes remained relatively steady, showing a slight decline of -1.2% on average per year between 2019 and 2023. According to their own calculations, an average annual growth of 4.3% is expected over the next 5 years. In terms of value, France had the second largest import value of honey in Europe, at €107 million.

Although France heavily relies on imports from other European countries, imports from non-European countries still account for 46% of imports. In 2023, France imported 14,438 tonnes of honey from emerging economies. The main suppliers to France are Ukraine, China, Argentina and Vietnam. Imports from non-EU countries are fairly distributed, meaning that not one country dominates most imports.

With €12.1 billion, France was Europe's second largest market in terms of organic retail sales in 2023, and the fourth largest in the world. French organic retail per capita amounted to €176 per person. In 2023, organic retail sales accounted for 6.1% of all retail sales in France, which is the seventh largest share worldwide. Over the past 5 years, organic retail sales in France have increased significantly at an annual average rate of 4.9%. French consumer demand for organic products has resulted in a high number of organic food processors and organic importers in the country. In fact, France had the third largest number of processors handling organic products (19,311) and organic-certified importers (662) in Europe in 2022.

Source: [FiBL Statistics](#), 2024

In France, the market for Fairtrade products has been resilient despite high inflation. In 2022, [sales of Fairtrade/Max Havelaar labelled products grew by 7.4%](#), generating a turnover of €1.3 billion. In the same year, more than 5,800 Fairtrade/Max Havelaar labelled products were sold, 70% of which were also organic. Paying farmers a fair price remains a priority for French consumers. As a result, 43% of consumers currently buy Fairtrade products and 52% intend to resume their regular consumption once inflation ends.

Belgium

Belgium is not a major producer of honey, producing only 2,700 tonnes of honey in 2023. Belgian apparent consumption amounted to 7,735 tonnes and per capita consumption is estimated at 0.66 kilo per person, lower than the European average European.

Still, Belgium offers many opportunities for suppliers outside Europe as it is a major trade hub in Europe, registering high import volumes of honey each year. Belgian honey imports reached 37,203 tonnes worth €80.5 million in 2023. Belgian honey imports account for 10.3% of all European imports and have shown significant growth during the past 5 years, both in volume (average annual growth rate of 10.7%) and value (8.8%). This trend is expected to continue, with imports growing at an average rate of 3.3% per year between 2024 and 2028.

Belgium is the third largest European importer from emerging economies. In 2023, Belgium imported 31,383 tonnes of honey from non-EU countries, accounting for 84% of total honey imports. The main supplying countries to Belgium are China, Vietnam, Argentina, Ukraine and Mexico. China dominates a large share of Belgian imports (68%), leaving a reduced space for which other supplying countries can compete.

Belgium is a rapidly growing market for organic food products. Between 2018 and 2022, organic retail sales in Belgium grew at an average of 8.2% per year. In 2023, Belgian organic retail sales accounted for €955 million, or 3.7% of all retail sales in Belgium. This is amongst the top 10 largest shares worldwide. In the same year, organic retail per capita was €84 per person. In response to growing consumer demand for organic food products, the number of organic-certified processors and importers in the country is also increasing. In 2022, Belgium registered 1,881 organic-certified processors and 365 importers, becoming one of the top 10 European countries with more organic-certified processors/importers. The growing demand for organic food products creates considerable opportunities for organic honey exporters from emerging economies, considering that [organic honey production is practically non-existent](#) in Belgium.

Source: [FiBL Statistics](#), 2024

Regarding Fairtrade, the total [market value of Fairtrade certified products has increased by 20%](#) compared to last year, and reached a total of €312 million by 2022. Although part of this growth can be explained by high inflation, it is still a remarkable growth. Fairtrade certification is gaining ground and is gradually making its way into Belgian supermarkets. Belgian consumers' perception of the organic and fair trade labels is very positive, scoring very well on all pillars related to climate, health, social justice, fair income and better working and living conditions for producers. In the Belgian market, [the organic and fair trade certifications complement each other very well](#).

Poland

Poland is the fourth largest consumer of honey in Europe, with an apparent consumption of 35,764 tonnes in 2022 and a [per capita consumption of 0.90 kg per person](#) per year. To fulfil its large demand for honey, Poland has positioned itself as one of the major honey importers in Europe.

In 2023, Poland imported 27,004 tonnes of honey, representing 7.5% of total European imports. On average, Polish import volumes declined by -2.3% per year between 2019 and 2023. This is mainly explained by the large drop in 2022/23 related to [lower consumption on the domestic market and reduced transport of raw material from Ukraine](#). Ukraine is the second largest honey supplier to the Polish market. Still, imports are expected to grow in the coming years, at an average rate of 6.8% per year, according to their own calculations.

Poland stands out as the fourth largest European importer of honey from emerging economies, with 86% of its total honey imports in 2023. Poland's main suppliers of honey are China, which dominates more than half of imports, followed by Ukraine, Turkey and Mexico.

Poland is not a big market for general organic food products. Organic retail sales accounted only for €310 million in 2023 and organic retail per capita was just €8 per person. Nevertheless, the Polish organic market is growing, with positive future forecasts. Between 2019 and 2023, Polish organic retail sales grew by 5.5% on average per year. Also, Poland is one of the top 10 countries with the largest number of organic-certified importers in Europe (267 importers in 2022).

The fair trade market in Poland has also shown overall growth. In 2022, the net wholesale sales value of Fairtrade certified products amounted to €175 million (PLN 749 million). This is a decline of 10% compared to the previous year, but still 34% higher than in 2020.

Source: [Fairtrade Polska](#), 2023

Spain

Spain is the fourth largest producer of honey in Europe. In 2022, Spain produced 27,400 tonnes of honey, accounting for 9.6% of total European production. Spain is also the fifth largest consumer of honey in Europe, with an apparent consumption of 34,273 tonnes and a [per capita consumption of 0.72 kg per person](#) per year.

Spain highly depends on imports to meet its demand for honey, which is why this country is the fourth largest honey importer in Europe. In 2023, Spain imported 31,383 tonnes of honey, representing 8.7% of total European imports. Over the past 5 years, Spanish imported volumes increasing at an annual average rate of 4.0%. Imports are expected to continue to grow at an average rate of 5.1% per year between 2024 and 2028.

Spain is the fifth largest European importer of honey from emerging economies. In 2023, Spain imported 15,569 tonnes of honey from developing countries, accounting for 50% of total imports. The main suppliers to Spain are Argentina, China, Ukraine and Cuba. In general, Spanish imports are fairly distributed amongst the different supplier countries.

Spain is amongst the top 10 countries with the largest organic retail sales in the world and in Europe, registering €2.5 billion in 2022. Organic retail per capita was €55 per person. The Spanish organic food market is growing steadily. Between 2018 and 2022, organic retail sales in Spain grew by 4.4% on average per year, showing high resilience to the economic situation. Spanish consumer demand for organic products is shown by the many organic-certified food processors and importers present in the country. In fact, Spain had the fourth largest number of organic-certified processors in Europe, with 5,773 processors in 2022, and the sixth largest number of organic-certified importers with 698.

The growth of the fair trade market is also large. In the last five years, sales of Fairtrade certified products in Spain increased by 221%. In 2022, [sales of Fairtrade certified products in Spain reached €139 million](#), with per capita consumption reaching €2.92. The [sales data show steady growth](#) despite the constrained post-pandemic economic situation. This upward trend is expected to continue in the coming years, although at a slower pace.

Tips:

Find importers that specialise in organic honey and honey products in the [international directory of organic food wholesale & supply companies](#).

Read more about organic market and production developments in the report entitled [The World of Organic Agriculture - Statistics & Emerging Trends 2024](#).

Check the national Fairtrade websites of your target country to keep up to date on developments in this market, for instance the national organisations of [Germany](#), [France](#) and [the UK](#).

4. Which trends offer opportunities or pose threats in the European certified honey market?

Despite the economic challenges in Europe, the organic and fair trade segments are expected to grow in the coming years. In addition, declining bee populations and the EU's fight against honey adulteration create an environment where certifications become increasingly important. Exporters who can offer certified products and meet market expectations may find a growing market in Europe.

Resilient organic and fair trade segments suggest a positive outlook for certified honey

Over the past few years, the harsh economic situation has affected consumers almost everywhere, leading many to cut back on food expenses. This has negatively impacted European imports and demand for several food products, including honey. Organic and Fairtrade honey are growing in demand, largely due to changing consumer preferences for healthier and more natural products. Although these segments are not immune to wider economic forces, they have proven resilient in the situation and positive recovery is expected.

In 2023, for the first time since 2008, organic food and drink sales in Europe showed a slight decline. However, the [decline in organic food and drink sales is currently only half of that of non-organic products](#). Honey in particular has managed to remain [amongst the products with the highest organic import shares in the EU at 9.2%](#), alongside olive oil, seeds, tropical fruit and sugar. Also, European consumers have shown to be loyal to Fairtrade products. Close to [56% of shoppers surveyed in 12 countries, including European countries, are willing to pay more for Fairtrade products](#) despite the increasing cost of living. This shows resilience in ethical shopping choices, with 44% of consumers buying at least one Fairtrade product per month, up three percentage points from two years ago.

Organic products have shown good growth over the past 11 years, and history indicates that despite periodic downturns, the market quickly returns to growth. Fairtrade is also expected to develop positively as the inflation continues to slow down in some markets like the UK. The top trends on [nature-friendly claims and health benefits are expected to inspire and result in higher expenses](#) in the short term. With consumers increasingly becoming more health and sustainability conscious, and with robust certification and marketing strategies, the future of organic honey looks promising.

Certifications are very relevant in this resilience and recovery context. This is because they help suppliers maintain their revenue streams when overall consumer spending is down. They also ensure some stable demand. Certifications resonate with the increasing number of eco-conscious consumers who see their purchases as contributions to social and environmental causes.

There are several examples of certified honey exporters supplying Europe that have benefited from certification in this context. For example, [Fairtrade cooperative Pueblo Apícola](#) from Uruguay and the organic/Fairtrade [Mexican cooperative EDUCE](#) have been able to maintain strong relationships with European buyers due to getting their products certified. Furthermore, they claim that these certifications have [allowed them to meet regulatory demands](#) and provide social benefits, such as education, health and home improvements, to their producers.

Certified honey helps to protect bees and mitigate threats

Declining bee populations pose a significant threat to honey production. Bees are currently facing numerous challenges, including climate change, disease, habitat loss and the impact of pesticides. Agroecological farming methods, such as organic farming, create havens for bees. Organic farms, on average, have [75% more wild bees compared to conventional farms](#). This is because organic farmers do not use chemical pesticides and provide more bee-friendly habitats, such as wildflower margins.

Public [awareness about the vulnerability and value of bees is at an all-time high](#). There is a positive agenda that builds a foundation for future bee conservation efforts and stresses the importance of increasing flower abundance, reducing pesticide use and restoring natural habitats. Certified honey producers ensure sustainable practices that can reduce risks and support bee health. Despite these efforts, the honey industry faces several obstacles, from environmental changes impacting bee habitats, to concerns about bee health and the persistent threat of adulteration. Environmental changes directly influence bee foraging patterns, disrupting the balance that is essential for honey production. Critical issues like disease, pesticide exposure and colony collapse disorder put bee populations at risk, directly impacting the sustainability of the honey market.

A [2022 report in the scientific journal Nature](#) reviewed the production of honey, honeybee populations and beeswax production over five decades. The report concludes that global human population growth has outpaced the growth of managed honeybee colonies. This trend raises the possibility of a shortage of pollinators to meet the increasing consumer demand for pollinated crops. This situation presents both opportunities and threats for honey exporters from developing countries.

On the one hand, the decline in bee populations globally and the increasing awareness of the importance of bees, can boost the demand for organic and sustainably-produced honey from developing countries. African countries, with their growing organic bee colonies and support from international organisations, have the potential to meet this demand with high-quality, natural honey. This is the case, for example, in [Ethiopia, Angola, Kenya, Zambia and Tanzania](#). On the other hand, the ongoing environmental and health challenges facing bees pose a significant threat to honey production. Exporters must navigate these challenges by adopting sustainable practices and securing certifications to ensure market access and to meet consumer expectations for purity and sustainability.

Certification offers advantages in an anti-adulteration environment

The honey market is plagued by issues of adulteration and counterfeit products, where cheaper sweeteners are mixed with honey or mislabelled as high-grade or organic honey. This poses a significant threat to the reputation of and trust in honey products. However, this challenge also creates opportunities for exporters of certified honey to Europe.

Buyers in Europe, concerned about the risks associated with adulterated honey, are increasingly looking to establish relationships with suppliers who can provide certified, high-quality honey. As an exporter, ensuring that your products are free from contaminants and are certified, helps build trust with your (potential) buyers.

In 2023, the European Commission published the results of its [coordinated action 'From the hives'](#), revealing that almost half of the honey imported into the EU could potentially be adulterated. Some experts even claim that the [percentage of products suspected of adulteration would have been higher](#) than reported if additional

scientific methods had been used. As such, there has been increased scrutiny to avoid adulteration. Several meetings have been held in the UK and the EU to discuss honey authenticity issues. Initiatives such as the [Honey Authenticity Network](#) have emerged. Some of Europe's largest honey markets, such as [Germany](#), [France](#) and [Spain](#), are already taking action in the quest for honey authenticity.

In the honey market, both consumers and importers are particularly concerned about antibiotics, which are often found in non-organic honey due to the excessive use of chemicals in beekeeping. For buyers, organic certification provides a guarantee that they are sourcing pure, uncontaminated honey. It also guarantees them that beekeeping activities are being inspected regularly.

Furthermore, growing consumer awareness and media coverage about the issues of honey adulteration further increase the importance of transparency and traceability in the supply chain. Certified honey producers can jump on this trend by providing detailed information about their production processes, further building consumer trust and loyalty.

Tips:

See our study on [trends for honey](#) to learn more about current trends in the European market.

Thinking about certifying your honey? Before engaging in any certification schemes, make sure to check that there is plenty of demand for your label in your target market. Also check to see whether it will be cost-beneficial for your product, always in consultation with your potential buyer.

In addition to promoting your certification, you should also promote other sustainable and ethical aspects of your production process. Supply chain transparency has become increasingly important. This means you should be able to prove and communicate a clear, direct link between producer and consumer.

[ProFound - Advisers In Development](#) carried out this study on behalf of CBI.

Please review our [market information disclaimer](#).