

Marketing Research on the Apiarian Products Market in Romania

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Abstract

Apiculture, as a branch of agriculture, has at its basis the bees' instinct of storing feed reserves beyond their consumption needs, such reserves being used by the beekeeper. The economic importance of apiculture is determined by the value obtained from the utilization of beekeeping products harvested by humans from bees: honey, propolis, pollen granules, royal jelly, venom, bee brood, beebread and wax, as well as by the value of products obtained from cultivated and wild plants through pollination. Additionally, apiculture is the only branch of agriculture that gathers the necessary raw materials from all forms of property without creating financial obligations. This paper presents the evolution of the main indicators regarding the number of bee colonies, honey production and honey consumption.

Keywords: apiculture, economic importance, main indicators.

1. Introduction

Honey is a natural product resulting from the processing by bees of flower nectar, sweet secretions present on other parts of the plant or excretions produced by some insects (Hemiptera), such as aphids, which live and parasitize parts of plants [1]

The economic importance of apiculture is given by the value and exploitation of apiary products: honey, propolis, pollen grains, royal jelly, bee venom, wax, bee bread, caps, but also of the agricultural products obtained from the cultivated and spontaneous plants through pollination.

From a food and hygiene point of view, by honey we understand the natural food extracted from honeycombs, when they have been covered by bees over at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of their surface, in such a way as to avoid the penetration of larvae (brood), brood, bee corpses, wax fragments or other impurities. [2]

Honey has been used for consumption, as well as for medicinal purposes, since ancient times. However, the consumption of natural honey has

been in decline for some periods, especially after the Industrial Revolution [3]. This last aspect today has been strongly positively influenced on the food market due to the increasing consumer interest in a healthy *life style* i.e. "healthy eating habits". Moreover, a lot of parents choose and look for natural products in order to ensure their children a healthy diet.

In addition to the positive health impact that honey has as a natural product one of the reasons that has contributed to the increase in honey consumption is the information acquired by the consumer regarding its nutritional value.

Honey production represents an agricultural sector of strategic importance for both Romania and the European Union, having direct implications for food security, ecological sustainability and rural economic development. Romania stands out as one of the main honey producers in Europe, alongside countries such as Spain, Hungary and Germany, benefiting from a climate favourable to beekeeping and a varied floral biodiversity. Traditional beekeeping methods practiced in Romania contribute to obtaining honey varieties with distinct nutritional and therapeutic properties,

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which gives them added value on the domestic and international market [4].

In the current context, marked by climate change, intensive use of pesticides and loss of natural habitats, the role of bees as pollinators is becoming increasingly crucial for maintaining agricultural yield and biological diversity.

Thus, apiculture can no longer be viewed solely as an economic activity, but as a fundamental pillar of agricultural sustainability as well. At the same time, consumer behaviour, European regulations on honey quality and the dynamics of intra-community trade significantly influence the evolution of this sector.

This paper aims to analyse market trends and honey consumption in Romania and highlight the factors that influence this field.

2. Materials and methods

This study analyses the honey market, the data taken into the study present a retrospective of the market, analysing the number of bee colonies, honey production, and consumption. Statistical data were used to conduct this study. At the same time, a SWOT analysis of the beekeeping sector in Romania was also carried out.

3. Results and discussion

According to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics and ICEADR, Romania recorded a constant increase in the number of bee colonies between 2018 and 2022, the growth rate being 20% in 2022 compared to 2018 [5]. Regarding honey production in the analysed period, we observe an oscillating trend in honey production. In 2019, honey production recorded a 16% decrease compared to 2018, in 2020 there was an increase of 21% compared to 2019, in 2021 there was an increase of 1.2% compared to 2020 and in 2022 there was a decrease of 3.4% compared to 2021. These production declines are due to climate change (drought, extreme temperatures), parasite infestations (*Varroa destructor*, *Nosema ceranae*), and the use of neonicotinoid pesticides.

The main characteristic of the Romanian market is that most of the production is carried out by small private producers, some of whom are under the protectionist umbrella of processors or trade associations or have supply contracts with them.

As for the Romanian population, consumers consider honey a product with multiple health benefits and also part of a healthy lifestyle. The importance given to honey, not only at a local or national level, but also at a global level, can be explained by the fact that it is presented as a natural product and as part of alternative medicine.

Table 1. The evolution of the number of bee colonies and honey production in Romania, 2018-2022

Source: Romanian Statistical Yearbook

Specification	UM	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Bee colonies	No.	1602453	1843026	1879611	1903000	1936000
Honey production	To	30177	25269	30714	30831	29760

UM- Unit of measurement

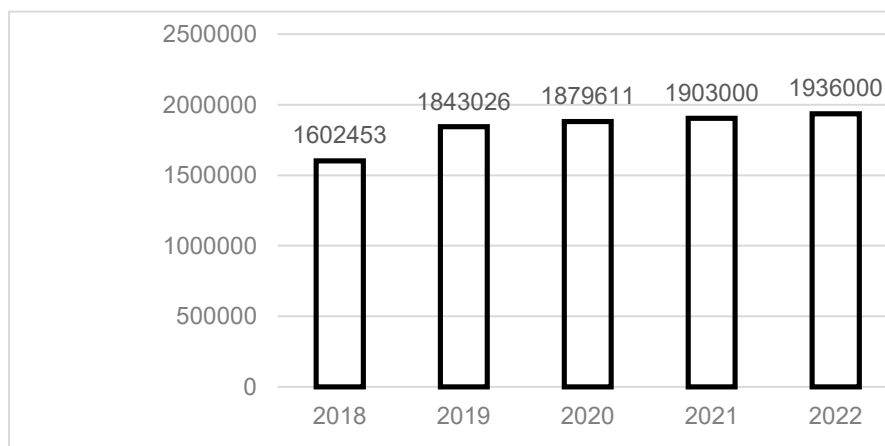


Figure 1. The evolution of the number of bee colonies in Romania

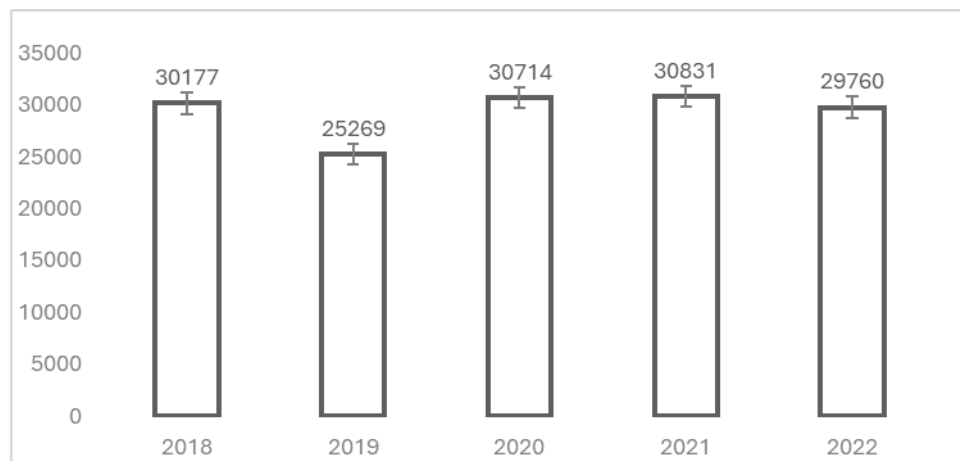


Figure 2. The evolution of honey production in Romania

Regarding honey consumption per capita, the situation according to F.A.O. data is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Honey consumption per capita in Romania
Source www.fao.org/faostat

Year	Consumption (kg/capita/year)
2018	0.87
2019	0.77
2020	0.77
2021	1.04
2022	0.97

Honey consumption in Romania experienced an interesting evolution between 2018 and 2022, influenced by factors such as increased interest in healthy eating, production fluctuations, and import pressure. Compared to European Union countries, Romania has low consumption even though there has been an increase in recent years. The increase in honey consumption in Romania reflects the increased interest of Romanian consumers in natural and quality products, but also a series of challenges in terms of information and education regarding healthy eating.

In Table 3 we will present the countries in the European Union where the highest consumption of bee honey was recorded. The data presented is for the year 2022.

From the analysis of the data presented in this table, we note that the highest honey consumption is recorded by Germany, then Austria, which has a well-supported beekeeping, followed by Greece, where honey is part of the Mediterranean diet, then Belgium, the Netherlands, France, where

honey is integrated into gastronomy (traditional recipes, sauces, desserts), and then Spain.

Table 3 Honey consumption per capita in EU countries
Source www.fao.org/faostat

Specification	kg/capita/year
Germany	2
Austria	1.8
Greece	1.6
Belgium	1.5
Netherlands	1.5
Poland	0.8
France	1.2
Spain	1

Honey consumption reflects not only the population's food preferences, but also the level of nutritional education, purchasing power, cultural traditions and the efficiency of the agri-food system. From the economic factors that directly influence honey consumption one is the purchasing power.

Countries like Germany, Austria or France, with stable economies and high average incomes, record an annual consumption of over 1 kg/capita per year. Another factor influencing honey consumption is nutritional and health, where honey is presented as a natural sweetener, with antimicrobial, antioxidant and immunostimulant properties. Other influencing factors are cultural and psychological. In Romania, honey has a symbolic value, being associated with rural traditions, gifts and holiday products. However, it is not consistently integrated into the daily diet. In France, honey is part of traditional gastronomy, being used in recipes, sauces, and desserts. he

Netherlands, although with limited domestic production, is experiencing steady consumption due to the preference for organic honey and modern packaging.

The perception of honey (natural vs. industrial) also influences the purchasing decision.

SWOT analysis of the Romanian honey market.

Strengths

- Excellent natural resources: Romania has a vast honey biodiversity (acacia, lime, sunflower, forests), favourable for the production of quality honey.
- Solid beekeeping tradition: Beekeeping is an activity with historical roots, passed down from generation to generation.
- Internationally recognized quality: Romanian honey is appreciated in the EU for its purity and variety.
- Large number of hives
- Diversity of beekeeping products: Pollen, propolis, royal jelly, wax – all contribute to market expansion.

Weaknesses

- Low domestic consumption: Below the European average (0.55–1.2 kg/capita/year), despite high production,
- Lack of an efficient market: Beekeepers face difficulties in direct sales and access to retail.
- Weak marketing: Few strong Romanian brands, unattractive packaging, lack of digital promotion.
- Fragmentation in the sector: Many small beekeepers, without effective association or cooperation.
- Differences between official data and reality: Statistics do not correctly reflect actual consumption and production.

Opportunities

- Increasing interest in natural and organic products: Honey can be promoted as a healthy alternative to sugar.
- Growing exports: Markets in France, Germany, Japan or the Middle East are looking for quality honey.
- Beekeeping tourism and education: Visits to apiaries, workshops, local producers – can attract tourists and consumers.
- Digitalization and e-commerce: Direct online sales to consumers can reduce dependence on intermediaries.

- European support through the CAP 2023–2027: Funds for modernization, organic certification, promotion.

Threats

- Massive imports of cheap honey: From China, Ukraine or Argentina - affect the price and confidence in Romanian honey.
- Climate changes: Unstable weather affects harvest and bee health.
- Pesticide use: Reduces floral resources and endangers bee colonies.
- Honey counterfeiting: Honey adulterated or mixed with syrups – affects the market image.
- Rural depopulation: The number of active beekeepers and knowledge transfer are decreasing.

4. Conclusions

The main characteristic of the Romanian market is that most of the production is carried out by small private

Regarding the population of Romania, consumers consider honey to be a product with multiple health benefits.

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