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Preserving What Bees Make Possible

Policy Needs for Beekeepers' Livelihoods, Farming Resilience, and Food Security

Bees make food production possible through pollination.
Beekeepers care for bees.

Honey bee health, nectar and pollen resources, and the quality of hive products are not abstract environmental outcomes. They are the **economic foundation of beekeepers' livelihoods**, just as soil fertility is for crop farmers or animal health is for livestock keepers.

Like many farmers, beekeepers often do not own the land on which they work or from which the bees forage. Additionally, **they depend on their colleagues' choices, landowners and policy coherence** to remain economically viable because bees' forage covers thousands of km^2.

Why bees and beekeepers are inseparable

Bees forage nectar and pollen from crops and wild flowers. Beekeepers do not control surrounding land use or practices (e.g., pesticide use, crop choices, flowering continuity, or the introduction of new plant traits into the landscape). Yet they suffer the consequences of these practices, including hunger and associated physiological stress and colony losses, increased production costs (for feeding and stock replacement), the risk of product contamination, and the loss of market access and consumer trust.

When policies are inconsistent, supporting beekeeping on the one hand while threatening its very basis, **beekeepers absorb the externalities created by other sectors**. This is not sustainable farming.

Why policy coherence is a livelihood issue for beekeepers

For beekeepers, the following applies:

- **Healthy honey bees = productive hives**
- **Poor environment (low diversity, monocultures and few landscape features = poor bee nutrition = lower production and higher production costs** (e.g., emergency food supply)
- **Production and product quality = market access and income**

Policy coherence is a determining factor in whether beekeeping remains a viable agricultural activity that contributes to rural economies and continues to provide essential pollination services to other agricultural producers.

Our policy coherence analysis shows that pollinator decline and beekeeping vulnerability are driven not by a lack of policies, but by misaligned ones.

Beekeeping is facing critical issues across both production and the market. Indeed, analysis of the EU honey market[1] shows that, even if EU production were to remain stable, fraudulent and low-quality imports would destabilise prices, thereby remaining a market problem.

Policies that directly affect beekeepers' livelihoods

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

Livelihood relevance:

The intensity of farming and crop/non-crop diversity determines whether bees find food or starve. CAP shapes the availability and continuity of forage. Poorly designed landscapes force beekeepers to manage their colonies more intensively (e.g., by feeding colonies or replacing them), move their hives more frequently, or accept lower yields and higher mortality rates.

Beekeepers ask for:

- Recognition of pollination and beekeeping as public goods under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and as functional indicators of food system sustainability.
- Targeted multi-annual, well-funded results-based schemes that deliver real forage, rather than paperwork, via nutrient and input policies that do not eliminate flowering resources, achieving a diverse landscape.
- Policy measures to help fellow farmers reduce their dependence on chemical inputs, which have the potential to pollute bees' products, reduce the quality of bee foraging and harm their health.

Bee Health linked Regulations & Apiculture Programmes

Livelihood relevance:

Bee health is a key component of productive beekeeping. Disease control alone does not ensure economic viability if bees starve or are poisoned, and if the market does not cover the costs incurred. To be healthy, bees need:

- A healthy environment (One Health)
- Efficient vet medications or breeding programmes to protect them from parasites (i.e., varroa) and a coherent strategy to avoid predators' impact (e.g., hornets).
- Reactive protection against alien species putting the European beekeeping sector at risk (e.g., *Tropilaelaps* spp.)

Beekeepers ask for:

- Pre-approved emergency response tools for beekeepers in case of *Tropilaelaps mercedesae* detection, including access to authorised varroa treatments/ derogations, coordinated movement restrictions when necessary, and financial support for affected beekeepers.
- A cost evaluation of invasive *Vespa* spp. impacts on the agricultural sector (e.g., the wine sector, fruit and vegetable production, apiculture, and agricultural workers), the environment, and public health at the EU level.
- Engaging Member States (MSs) in combating invasive or neoinvasive vespids, ensuring that the competent authorities fulfil their management obligations to minimise economic damage. Exchange between MSs and stakeholders should be promoted at the EU level to share knowledge, developments and advance control measures.
- Intensive support for the breeding of resistant regional bee strains and their dissemination among beekeepers in the respective areas.

Fighting Fraud

Fraud is not a marginal issue, but a structural threat to beekeepers' livelihoods. EU investigations[2] show that 46% of analysed imported honey samples were suspected of non-compliance with the Honey Directive, including

[1] https://app.pollinatorhub.eu/articles/2

[2] https://food.ec.europa.eu/food-safety/eu-agri-food-fraud-network/eu-coordinated-actions/honey-2021-2022_en

adulteration and mislabelling. Fraudulent honey sold at prices as low as €1.4/kg undercuts EU production costs and destroys fair competition.

Beekeepers ask for:

- Taking into account the beekeeping sector in the UTP[3] Directive.
- Accelerate a stricter enforcement of the Honey Directive and quality standards intrinsic to honey as harvested from the hive.
- Harmonise the numerous analytical methods and, if proven suitable, adopt them as official methods for fraud detection across the EU to keep up with future counterfeits.
- Creation of an EU database of authentic honey to support controls in the frame of a European Reference Centre or Reference Laboratory.
- Full traceability along the supply chain, including imports and blends.
- A mandatory Honey Fraud Mitigation Guidance for all market actors.
- Measures to disincentivise fraudsters, including trade and market tools, with exemplary penalties to deter fraudsters, incl. imprisonment as well as a lifetime ban from working in the food industry — including, but not limited to, the honey sector.
- Conducting increased audits in export companies following appropriate risk analysis.
- Special monitoring of sister companies operated by a single company in the exporting and importing countries to circumvent traceability.
- Protecting and promoting the image of honey to consumers, increasing demand for authentic EU honey.
- Supporting the sector in conducting anti-dumping proceedings.

Pesticides & Chemicals Policy

Livelihood relevance:

Chemical exposure weakens colonies and contaminates hive products. This leads to a reduction in product quality, going up to and including loss of marketability and increased production costs and costs for colony replacement without compensation.

Beekeepers ask for:

- Binding input reduction pathways, supporting modern drift reduction techniques, maintaining the ban on aerial spraying and ensuring pesticide use according to the law, in compliance with clear reduction targets, by ensuring implementation of IPM.
- Use the CAP money to promote IPM implementation (see our Bee-friendly IPM eco-scheme).
- Alignment between pesticide authorisation and bee product safety.
- Implementation of comprehensive environmental monitoring that takes into account all new risks of pollinator poisoning and contamination of hive products from external causes (microplastics, chemicals, heavy metals in the soil, etc.).
- Incorporating the impact on bees and other pollinators into risk assessments (RA) during the authorisation of PPPs, keeping RA methodologies up to scientific knowledge.

Biodiversity Strategy & Nature Restoration Law

Livelihood relevance:

Restoration that improves habitat connectivity increases foraging quality, reduces colony losses, and beekeeping production costs (e.g., feeding) and income volatility.

Beekeepers ask for restoration designed at the landscape scale, with beekeepers involved and a focus on functional outcomes for pollination, not merely on hectares restored. Avoid renaturalisation efforts to go against the beekeeping sector.

New Genomic Techniques (NGTs)

Livelihood relevance:

NGTs may alter pollen composition, flowering patterns and morphology, and increase herbicide use, thereby reducing wildflower presence, nectar flow, and

[3] Unfair Trading Practices

bees' foraging opportunities. Furthermore, plant breeding patents reduce crop diversity in the field. This reduces the diversity of available food for pollinators and makes agriculture more vulnerable to environmental change, thereby increasing pesticide use.

Beekeepers ask for:

- Traceability and transparency of NGT products.
- Risk assessment covering plant traits of interest to bees and bee products.
- Extension of the negative list to include other substances, such as plant-derived fungicides, that could be harmful to pollinators and other non-target organisms.
- Co-existence rules recognising beekeeping as an exposed farming activity.
- A general ban on patents on plants or plant material that also exists in nature or could occur naturally.
- General consideration in plant breeding of characteristics that are vital for pollinators, such as the quantity and quality of pollen and nectar and their accessibility.

What beekeepers are asking from AGRI Members

Beekeepers are not asking for exemptions or privileges.
They are asking for **fair farming conditions and a fair market**.

Specifically, they ask the AGRI Committee to:

1. Treat beekeeping as a **full agricultural sector** rather than an externality.
2. Require **policy coherence checks** across policies affecting land use and chemicals, such as CAP, pesticides, biodiversity, and innovation, to ensure that risks are not externalised onto beekeepers.
3. Protect bee products from **contamination.**
4. Protect beekeeping operations from **fraudsters and unfair trading practices.**
5. Defend beekeepers' incomes as contributing to **EU food security.**
6. Establish **monitoring systems linking bee health, nutrition, and product quality.**

Without policy coherence, beekeepers lose income, farmers lose pollination and face yield stagnation, and our European food systems lose resilience.

Helping beekeepers is helping European agriculture.
Beekeepers are asking the AGRI Committee to prioritise policy coherence in farming. The political goal of professionalising and enabling growth in the beekeeping sector can be achieved only if bees are provided with a healthy environment, and beekeepers are protected from fraud and unfair market prices.

About BeeLife: **BeeLife European Beekeeping Coordination** is an umbrella non-profit organisation dedicated to protecting bees, pollinators and agriculture in the European Union. Through research, advocacy, and collaboration, BeeLife promotes a sustainable environment in which pollinators can thrive, thereby supporting European biodiversity and food security.

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