

Brussels, 4 December 2024
(OR. en)

16557/24

AGRI 863
AGRILEG 452
AGRIFIN 140
AGRISTR 89
AGRIORG 174

NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	AOB item for the meeting of the “Agriculture and Fisheries” Council on 9/10 December 2024: Conference on the future of the European apiculture sector (Brussels, 28 November 2024) <i>- Information from the Presidency</i>

A conference on the future of the European apiculture sector was organised by the Hungarian Presidency on 28th November 2024 in Brussels. This document aims to summarize the main findings and conclusions of the event.

There was a consensus that pollinators are essential for the maintenance of agricultural production, biodiversity and food security, and are key indicators of the health of agro-ecosystems. As commonly accepted, nearly 90% of wild flowering plants and 80% of cultivated plants depend at least partially on the transport of pollen by animals.

In recent years, a large-scale decrease can be observed globally in the occurrence and diversity of pollinating organisms. The lack of adequate pollination contributes to economic loss to farmers, rising food prices and a competitive disadvantage on the world market. The decrease in the ecosystem service activity of natural pollinators could be partly compensated by the beekeeping sector, which is an important sector from both an economic and social point of view.

Participants agreed that the apiculture sector's importance goes far beyond the economic value of the honey produced, however, it is under severe pressure: urbanization, intensive production, bee diseases, non-pollinator-friendly plant protection procedures, the effects of climate change and the volatile honey market situation are all factors that have a negative effect on beekeeping. In recent years, the proportion of imported non-natural honey has increased significantly on the European market, putting a pressure on honey prices, as large quantities of such imported products arrive at price levels barely a third of the EU honey producer price.

Conference speakers highlighted that beekeeping must provide beekeepers with an adequate livelihood, it is necessary to encourage the keeping of bees in order to stop the decrease in the number of bee hives and to always have an adequate amount of pollinators available.

An important and symbolic conclusion point of the conference was that European beekeeping does not only play a role in supplying EU consumers with honey, but also provides an important ecosystem service that is currently not recognized and – unlike honey – cannot be imported.

There was consensus that in the long term financial tools provided for beekeepers under the CAP should also reward pollination as an ecosystem service. Joint action at the European level is needed in the interest of the EU beekeeping sector and European consumers, and for preserving food security.

At the same time swift action is necessary as well, because of the deep and prolonged crisis of the honey market.

Based on the Conference's findings the Presidency considers that the following steps should be taken to address the situation:

- a one-off support should be made available for beekeepers as soon as possible to manage the market crisis caused by imported non-natural honey,
- new support schemes above the current sectorial programs should be introduced in the CAP to compensate the valuable ecosystem services of beekeeping, and

- market measures should be envisaged in order to save the ecosystem services provided by the beekeepers, including developing methods for testing the authenticity of honey and improving traceability.
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