

“From the Hives”: Results of the EU Action Against Honey Adulteration

Anna Pinggen

News

On 21 March 2023, the Commission communicated the results of the EU-coordinated action called “From the hives”, led by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE). It also involved the national authorities of 18 countries that are part of the EU Food Fraud Network, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), and the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre (JRC). The aim of the coordinated action was to assess the market prevalence of honey adulterated with sugar. The result of the operation showed that a significant proportion of honey imported into the EU probably does not comply with the provisions of the “Honey Directive” (Council Directive 2001/110/EC). Thanks to OLAF, 44 EU operators were investigated and seven sanctioned.

Investigations led by OLAF, consisting of on-site inspection, sampling, and close examination of computers and phone records, revealed complicity between exporters and importers. The malpractices included, for example, the use of additives and colouring, masking of the true geographical origin of the honey, and the use of sugar syrups.


Ville Itälä, Director-General of OLAF, commended the team effort necessary for the coordinated action:

“The key word was teamwork. The European Commission’s Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety initiated and coordinated the entire action. OLAF investigated to help identify suspicious operators, performed on-the-spot checks with national authorities, acquired and analysed computer and phone records. Colleagues at the JRC analysed samples collected at borders in their laboratories to detect adulteration. National authorities were, as always, on the front line of checks and investigations on the ground.

OLAF has investigated international food fraud before and I am very glad that we could lend our experience. The EU is an importer of honey as the internal demand is higher than our domestic production. It is important that we remain vigilant against any abuse. The most frequent type of fraud with honey happens via adulteration, meaning by adding cheap ingredients instead of keeping the honey pure. But we also found instances of origin fraud, with labels claiming false origins of the product. This action served to raise attention, call for order, and deter any fraudulent practices.”

DG SANTE published a comprehensive [report](#) with the results of the action. It involved 16 EU Member States as well as Norway and Switzerland.

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