

NewsLetter



Buzz off!

Defra responds to EU Honey Fraud survey

In 2023, the EU Commission published its report “From the Hives” which revealed an alarming incidence of suspected food fraud with respect to honey imported into the EU.

Many samples, including ones taken from UK honey, were reported as “suspicious” due to the likely presence of added sugar or syrups. These were identified by the EU Commission’s Joint Research Centre who used analytical methods to detect “markers” for these sugars and syrups which indicated the likely adulteration of the honey.

As part of their response to this report, Defra established an independent expert working group to review the testing methods and results for UK samples referred to in the report.

In summary they concluded that limitations in the testing methods used during the survey brought the validity of the reported results into question.

What was the “From the Hives” study?

Between October 2021 and February 2022, a total of 320 samples of imported honey were taken at EU Border Control Posts.

This included 13 samples of UK honey all of which were subsequently reported as “suspicious of being non-compliant with the provisions of the EU Honey Directive 2001/110/EC”

What did the expert group conclude?

Due to the identified limitations in methodology and subsequent interpretation of results, the expert group considered that use of the term “suspicious” in the EU report with respect to UK sample results was inappropriate.

This is because there may have been legitimate reasons for the presence of certain chemical “markers” found in the honey and it was not correct to assume that their presence was simply due to adulteration.

As such, the expert group recommended using the phrase ‘flag for further investigation’ in relation to results where a potential marker of adulteration was detected and where follow-up would be worthwhile.

More Information

- [From the Hives EU Study](#)
- [Defra: Review of methods applied in the ‘From the Hives’ survey on honey authenticity](#)

ABC Webinars

- Honey
- Food Fraud