

UK honey trade trends and effects on domestic beekeepers - research proposal

Introduction:

The importance of bees for humanity and our planet is hard to overstate because of their essential role in the pollination of plant life. I believe there is a knowledge gap on one issue affecting bees that deserves investigation.

Based on some early analysis I've done on UN honey trade figures, there are a couple of interesting trends going on in the global honey trade. Traditional exporters like Mexico, Argentina and Chile are seeing drops in export volumes and income, while new producers like Ukraine, China and India are producing increasing exports. Global beekeeper interest groups like Apimondia are reporting growing concerns of honey adulteration and fraud from these new exporter nations which are pushing down production costs and prices through a variety of adulteration methods.

A 2016 study by Moritz and Eler claims the global honey trade affects honeybee colony numbers in importing countries as domestic beekeepers are undercut by falling prices (of the 11 major honey exporters I've studied figures for, export price per kg of honey fell for all but three of them from 2016-20). This has environmental implications, as bee populations are very much dependent on beekeepers staying in business.

Research proposal:

This research seeks to examine the relationship between a) UK honey import prices and domestic colony numbers, and b) UK honey import trends by country and domestic colony numbers from 1970-2020. This will involve the use of both quantitative and qualitative data. Any trends or correlations identified could produce policy ideas for protecting UK honeybees and inform sustainable consumer choices.

Quantitative data will be gathered from the UN COMTRADE database, UK Trade Info, the FAO, BeeBase, European Commission, existing studies and documents from the British Library, Parliamentary Archives and The National Archive. I plan to use correlation tests to establish whether there are correlations between the aforementioned trends.

For qualitative data I plan to interview professional British beekeepers on trends in the British honey industry and whether they feel any particularly factors have affected their business, particularly import prices and import trends. I plan to identify potential participants via online searches for British honey farms, before approaching them via email with the attached information sheet. If they wish to proceed I will ask them to sign the

attached consent form. Participants will be subject to an audio-recorded semi-structured interview via the most appropriate medium e.g telephone, video call or in-person. Any published excerpts will be quoted anonymously. I plan to recruit eight participants.

This qualitative data will be supplemented by Bee Farmers' Association records held at the University of York's archives.