

The Journey of Romanian Honey from the Hive to the Consumer

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Abstract. Beekeeping is one of the oldest traditional activities in Romanian agriculture. This sector plays an essential role in biodiversity by maintaining plant species and increasing crop production. In recent years, honey production has increased and demand on the domestic and foreign markets has intensified. The study aims to analyze the beekeeping sector in Romania, which are the most frequently used promotion methods by honey producers in Romania, to what extent they are effective in increasing the visibility of Romanian beekeeping products on the market and overview the state support for keeping sector. This analysis was carried out by launching a questionnaire comprising a set of 20 questions aimed at beekeepers in Romania. The results of the research show that the most effective methods of promoting honey are online and marketing through recommendations. The results are relevant for establishing the marketing strategies used by beekeepers in their efforts to sell products on domestic and foreign markets

Keywords: beekeeping, honey, strategic plan, organic farming, marketing.

Introduction

Beekeeping is a vital economic sector, contributing to rural development by creating jobs and generating income for beekeepers, especially in areas where other agricultural activities are limited (Chitea, 2022). Romanian honey market has had an ascending dynamics and Romania is an important honey producer (Panta, 2018). From a social point of view, beekeeping supports local communities through the production of honey and other bee products, stimulating trade and promoting local traditions (Chiurciu et al., 2024). In addition to its economic and social benefits, beekeeping plays a key role in maintaining ecological balance, as bees are indispensable pollinators for biodiversity and crop productivity. Without pollination, many plant species and food crops would be seriously affected, endangering food security and natural ecosystems (Hosseini et al., 2024; Sonea et al., 2020).

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According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2023), bees are essential for ecosystem health and food security and ensure the production of nutritious food. Approximately 35% of global crop production requires pollination by bees and other pollinators, making these insects important for achieving sustainable agriculture. In addition, the survival of bees has economic value, as approximately 10% of total economic output from agriculture depends on pollinators such as bees, and beekeeping provides a vital source of income for rural livelihoods (Durazzo et al., 2021). Consumers highly seek beekeeping products such as acacia honey, honeydew, royal jelly, polyflora, pollen, propolis, and tinctures. The health benefits of these products have been recognized since ancient times, contributing to their steady consumption and a gradually expanding market (Waykar et al., 2016)

Considering all this, it can be said that the beekeeping sector has high development potential, a process that requires honey to be promoted and consumers to be educated in the meaning of the consumption and benefits of this product (Enache et al, 2022).

In this direction, the study aims to achieving the following objective: to identify the opportunities, challenges and perspectives of beekeeping sector in Romania, the research questions of this study were as follows:

- What us the structure of beekeeping in Romania, as compared to other European countries?
- What are the main types of apicultural products obtained in Romania, and what is their relative share in total production?
- What are the primary sales channels used by Romanian beekeepers, and how accessible is the local market for them?
- Who is the primary target consumers for Romanian apicultural products?
- What are the most effective promotional methods for beekeeping products, and how widely are they used by Romanian beekeepers?
- To what extent do beekeepers use labeling and branding strategies to increase product visibility on the market?
- What are the main challenges faced by Romanian beekeepers in marketing their products, particularly in the context of competition from imported honey?
- What are the most common distribution channels used by beekeepers to sell their products?
- To what extent do Romanian beekeepers use online platforms for product promotion?
- What are the perceived challenges and benefits of selling beekeeping products through e-commerce platforms?

The novelty of the research consists in exploring producers' perspectives upon beekeeping development and market. Producers have numerous methods for developing their businesses, among them, online promotion is one of the most accessible and cost-effective. Beekeepers use social media to promote honey and bee products and to sell them.

The paper is divided into five parts. After the introduction, the research methodology is presented, then the data are analyzed, and finally the results are discussed and conclusions are drawn.

Methodology

The information used in this study comes from official sources, such as Eurostat and FAOSTAT, which provide data on total honey production, number of hives and number of beekeepers. The data used were processed to highlight the evolution of honey production and exports in Romania, providing a clear picture of the dynamics of this sector. Furthermore, in order to analyze the marketing strategies in the beekeeping sector in Romania, the Research used the Survey as the method of information collection, and the questionnaire as the instrument.

The hypotheses from which the research started and the objectives corresponding to each question in the questionnaire are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research hypotheses and objectives

Objectives	Hypotheses	Questions
Identification of beekeeping products and their share in total apicultural products	According to statistical data, honey has the largest share (INS, 2024)	What types of beekeeping products do you produce?
Determination of marketing methods used by beekeepers	The local market is accessible for most beekeepers	How do you sell your beekeeping products?
Identification of the target audience	Local market consumers are the main target customers, given that the local market is easily accessible to beekeepers	Who is the target audience for your products?
Determination of the most effective advertising methods for beekeeping products	Online advertising is the most accessible form of promotion, being cost-effective and having a large audience	What promotional methods do you consider to be the most effective?
Identification of labeling methods to increase market visibility	Brand insignia or various certification labels can be used	Do you use labels or special packaging?

Source: authors' contribution.

The questionnaire was created using Google forms and distributed to organic farming operators and agricultural departments in Romania. The questionnaire was structured in several parts: general information about beekeepers, the relevance of support measures, marketing strategy and suggestions for improving the beekeeping sector. The questions asked concerned elements related to the size of the holding, production method, setting the selling price, marketing method, diversity of products obtained, promotion channels and suggestions for improving the beekeeping sector in Romania. The sample was calculated using scientific methods, starting from a total population of 1189 beekeepers registered in organic farming (MADR, 2024) and 35459 beekeepers in conventional farming, resulting in 280 beekeepers interviewed, the sampling having an accepted error of 5%.

The independent variables of the research are the beekeepers' experience (in years) and the size of the business (number of hives). The sample structure according to these variables is shown in Figure 1.

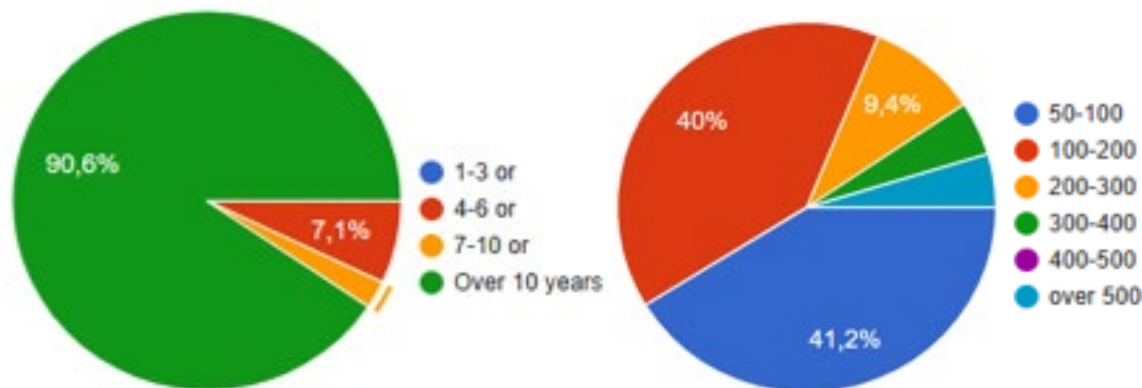


Figure1. The sample structure

Source: results of the survey.

The respondents are registered operators in organic farming, with more than 10 years of experience. It can be seen that beekeepers are divided into small operators, who own up to 100 hives, and large operators, who own over 500 hives. The dependent variables of the research are: the typology of beekeeping products obtained, the annual quantity of beekeeping products marketed, the methods of promoting beekeeping products used, the target audience targeted by the promotion strategies, the beekeepers' perceptions of the most effective methods of promoting beekeeping products, the use of special labels or packaging, the beekeepers' perceptions of the main challenges encountered in marketing the products, the beekeepers' perceptions of the demand for beekeeping products, the methods of setting the prices of beekeeping products, the distribution channels used for beekeeping products, the use of online platforms for promoting beekeeping products, the use of online commerce platforms for selling beekeeping products.

Results

Beekeeping in Romania plays an essential role in agriculture, with a long tradition and significant economic importance. In our country, favorable climatic conditions and varied flora allow for the production of high-quality beekeeping products (Popescu et al., 2019; Rosu, 2023). The regions where most bee colonies are registered are the south, southeast, east and center.

According to official statistical data, there are approximately 36,000 beekeepers in Romania, with approximately 2,400,000 hives, resulting in an average of 67 hives per beekeeper. In organic agriculture, 1,189 beekeepers are registered with 189,674 hives, resulting in an average of 160 hives per beekeeper.

According to FAO data, in 2022, Romania was among the largest honey producers in the European Union, preceded by Germany, followed by countries such as Spain, Poland and France. Figure 2

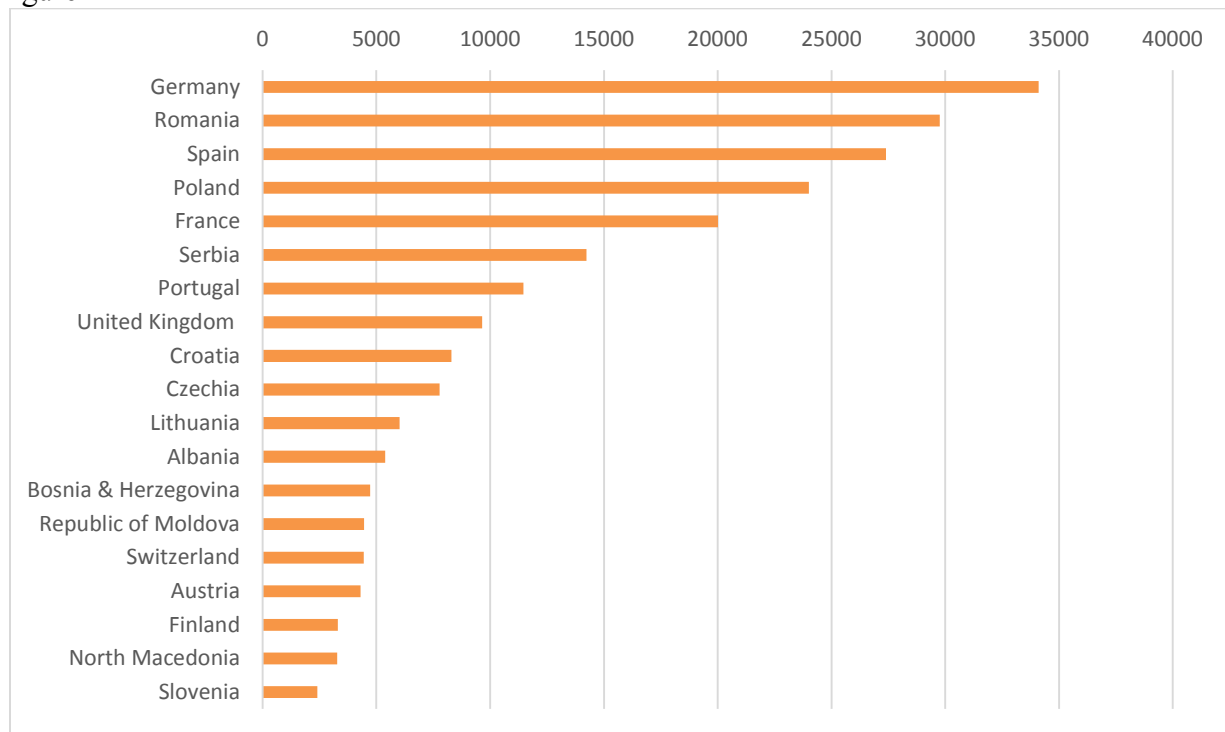


Figure 2. Quantity of honey produced in Europe (tons, 2022)

Source: FAO, 2025.

The number of hives in organic farming is 175,000 (MARD, 2025), in 2022, more than 171,000, in 2021, showing an ascendant trend.

Regarding the production of conventional and organic honey between 2019 and 2022, it is observed that the production of organic honey fluctuated significantly, reaching a minimum in 2020 (4,480 tons) and a maximum in 2021 (8,673 tons). In contrast, the production of conventional honey was more stable, varying between 25,269 tons (2019) and 30,831 tons (2021). The percentage of organic honey in total production varied between 14.78% (2020) and 28.13% (2021), indicating a significant increase in this category in certain periods (Figure 3.)

In 2023, the total production of conventional honey was 31,541 tons, and a production of 7,392 tons was obtained for organic honey.

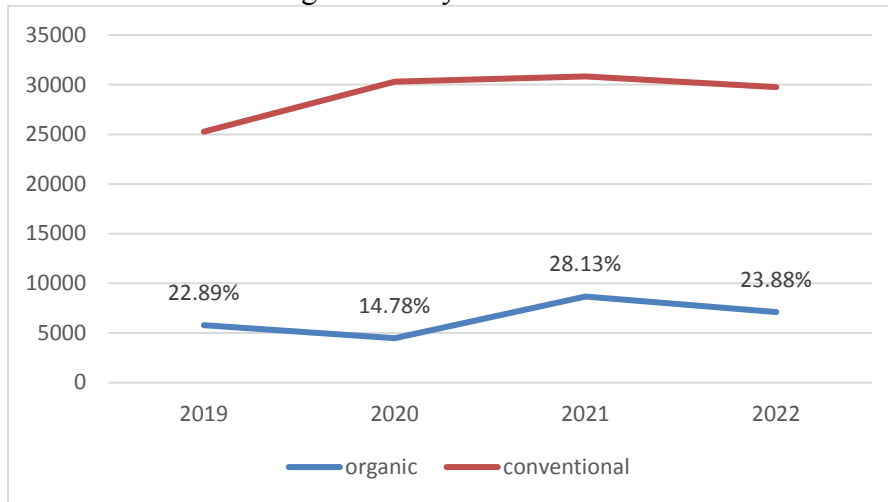


Figure 3. Quantity of honey produced in Europe (tonnes) and share of organic honey vs conventional
Source: EUROSTAT, 2025.

Exports play an important role in capitalizing on domestic production, with over 20% of honey produced destined for foreign markets. In 2023, Romania exported 10,590 tons of honey, with the main destinations being Germany, Italy and Austria, Japan and Poland (Figure 4). Romania remains an important honey exporter, but with challenges in maintaining export stability and the need to find new markets to compensate for declines in some regions. Romanian honey exports fluctuated between 2019 and 2023, reaching a peak of 13,743 tons in 2020, followed by a slight decrease in the following years.

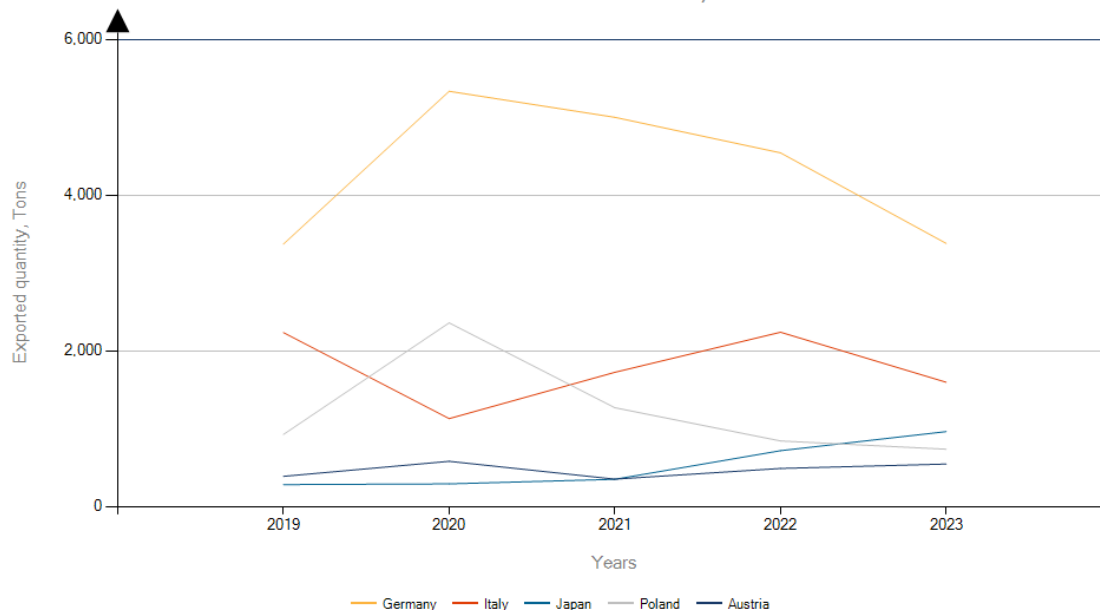


Figure 4. Importing countries for the honey produced in Romania

Source: EUROSTAT, 2025.

Next, the responses of the 280 beekeepers to the questions in the questionnaire are analyzed. It is observed that the largest share is held by honey, which suggests that it remains the main product of beekeepers (Figure 5). Also, pollen and propolis are relatively well represented, indicating a diversification of production. Products such as royal jelly or bee venom have a lower presence, which may indicate either a lower demand or a greater difficulty in the production process. This distribution reflects the general trends in beekeeping, where honey remains the main product, while the other products are produced in smaller quantities, but with high added value.

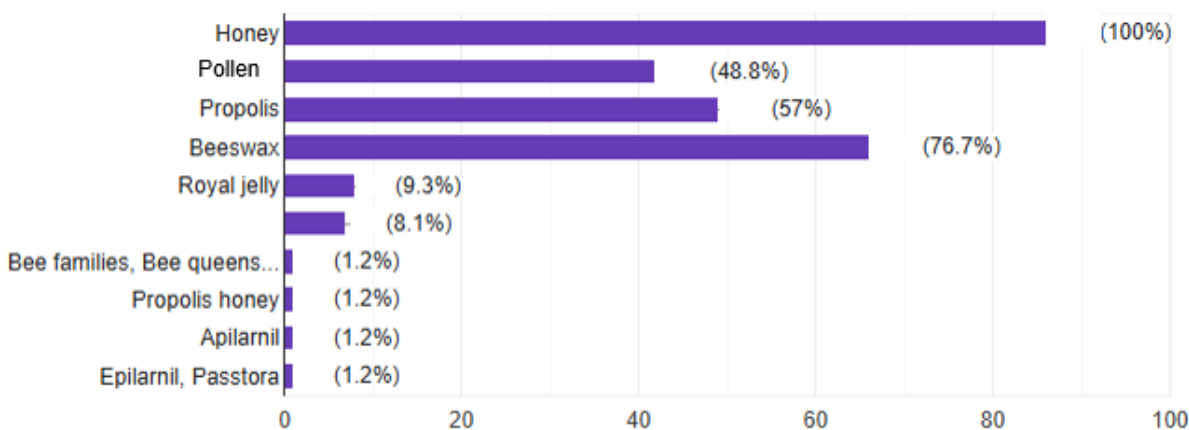


Figure 5. Typology of beekeeping products obtained

Source: results of the survey.

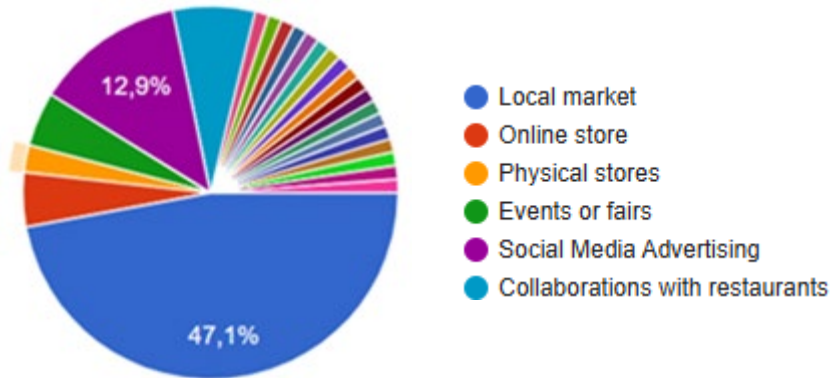


Figure 6. Methods to promote final products

Source: results of the survey.

Regarding the distribution of the methods by which beekeepers sell their products, it can be seen that the local market is the main promotion channel, representing 47.1% of the total, which suggests a preference for direct sales and contact with customers (Figure 6). The next important channel is represented by sales to processors, with 12.9%, indicating an orientation towards wholesale distribution. Other methods, such as online stores, physical stores, events and fairs, have lower shares, but show the diversification of promotion strategies. Advertising on social networks and collaborations with restaurants or other partners are used to a lesser extent, which could suggest either a lack of resources for digital marketing or a preference for traditional promotion methods. In general, beekeepers seem to rely largely on direct sales and collaborations with processors to sell their products.

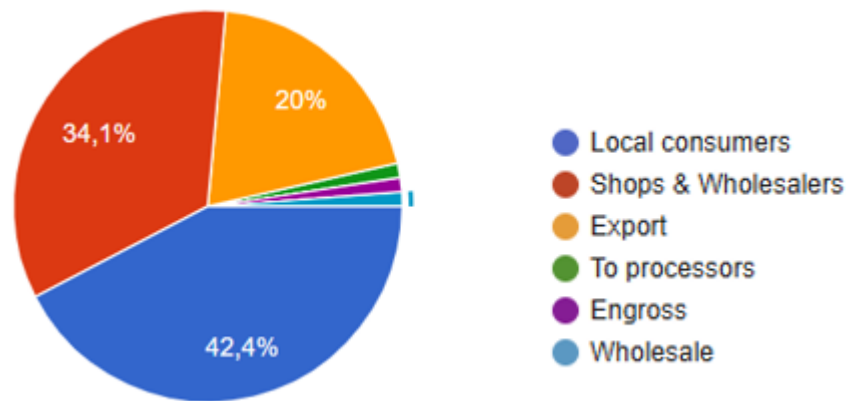


Figure 7. Targeted markets

Source: results of the survey.

The largest part (42.4%) of the production is sold directly to local consumers, which indicates a preference for direct sales and close relationships with customers (Figure 7). This practice emphasizes the importance of the local market and the direct relationship between producers and consumers, allowing beekeepers to obtain a better price and promote local bee products (Ababor et al., 2018). Stores and wholesalers represent 34.1%, which suggests that a large part of the honey reaches the organized commercial circuit. This approach facilitates the access of bee products to retail networks and ensures a constant presence on the market. Export has a share of 20%, showing that a significant part of the production is intended for the foreign market. The other categories, such as processors, wholesalers and en-gross market, have very small, almost

insignificant shares. This distribution indicates a beekeeping market oriented mainly towards direct sales and shops, with moderate expansion on the international market.

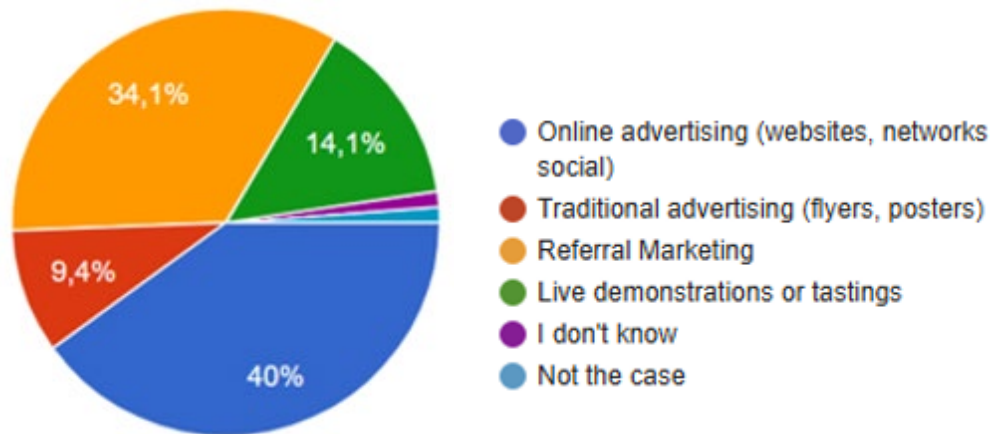


Figure 8. The most efficient methods of promotion

Source: results of the survey.

Online advertising (40%) is considered the most effective method of promotion. This includes the use of websites and social networks, a relevant aspect in the digital age, where consumers are increasingly active on online platforms. The second important method is marketing through recommendations (34.1%), which suggests that beekeepers rely heavily on promotion through satisfied customers, who recommend the products to others. This indicates the importance of a quality product and a good relationship with consumers. Traditional advertising (9.4%), such as flyers and posters, has a lower relevance, while live demonstrations or tastings (14.1%) are appreciated to convince consumers through direct experience (Figure 8).

Regarding the use of labels and special packaging, we note that 31.8% of producers use standard packaging, which suggests a common practice in the industry. However, a significant percentage (28.2%) use personalized labels and packaging, which allows them to differentiate their products in the market (Figure 9). Also, a significant number of producers (29.4%) consider that special labeling or packaging is not necessary, which may indicate direct sales in bulk or to partners who repackage the product. A smaller percentage uses logos and signs for organic farming, which shows that only a part of beekeepers focus on certifying their products as originating from organic agriculture.

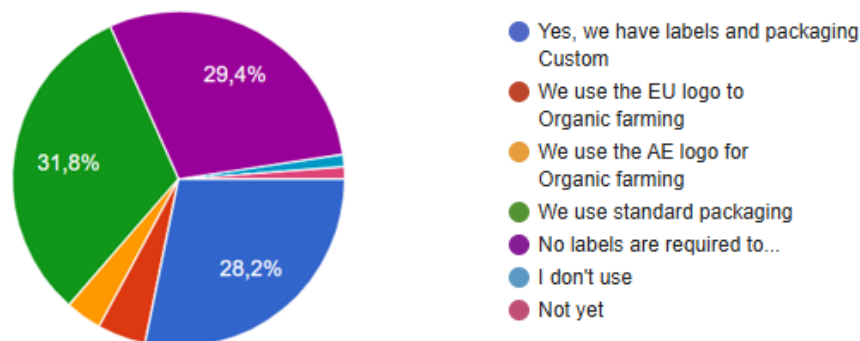


Figure 9. Use of customized labels and packaging

Source: results of the survey.

When comparing trends in Romania's beekeeping sector with those from other European countries, honey remains the leading product, just like in other leading producers like Spain, Hungary, Germany, and Poland. In these countries, the beekeeping market was backed up by national policies and a marketing strategy that defined the promotion of beekeeping products in external markets and the stimulation of consumption by educating the public on the benefits of honey and other derived products. The difference between Romania and the other European countries is in the spectrum diversification of beekeeping products. While in Romania, pollen and propolis are relatively well represented and royal jelly and bee venom are niche products, these premium products are much more developed in France and Germany, integrated quite well into the pharmaceutical and cosmetic industries (Lyubenov, 2020).

In Germany, for instance, there was constant growth in the demand for organic and premium bee products over the past decade, and market strategies include collaborative efforts among beekeepers and pharmacies or organic stores to attract consumers looking for healthy and sustainable products (Joseph et al., 2023).

Romania could very much take advantage of such an approach, backing its beekeepers to specialize in high-value-added products. Another considerable difference is in the level of application of organic certifications. In Romania, there are still relatively few beekeepers who are organically certified, despite possibilities provided by natural conditions (Lazar et al., 2022) for the production of organic honey. In comparison, organic certification is much more widespread in Italy and Austria and consumers more willing to pay premium prices for organic honey (Lyubenov, 2021).

This is an opportunity for Romania, where the expansion of organic certification could bring significant benefits both in increasing the selling price and in accessing premium foreign markets, where demand for organic products is growing.

On the other hand the collected data shows that Romanian beekeepers prefer direct sales and the local market as the main marketing channel, similar to the situation in other European countries. However, Romania has a low level of use of digital platforms for the promotion and sale of honey, in contrast to beekeepers in Western European countries. In Germany, Italy and France, digital marketing plays a key role in the success of small and medium-sized beekeepers, allowing them to reach a larger number of consumers and develop their brand (Kaygisiz, 2021, Sparacino et al., 2024). In Romania, only 40% of beekeepers consider online promotion to be the most effective marketing method, but this strategy is underused in practice. In other countries, platforms such as Amazon or marketplaces specialized in organic products are heavily used to sell honey and other beekeeping products. An increase in the presence of Romanian beekeepers on online platforms could help expand the market, attract new customers and increase income.

Subsidies and financial support for beekeepers in Romania

In our country, in line with European Union policies, there are various forms of financial support for the development of beekeeping. Support policies are intended to sustain both conventional and organic beekeeping, contributing to increasing production, improving product quality and protecting bees.

The financial support is directed through the CAP Strategic Plan (Common Agricultural Policy) for the period 2023-2027, approved by the European Commission. This plan aims to develop a resilient and sustainable agricultural sector, improving the economic viability of farms and the competitiveness of the agricultural sector (Chitea, 2023).

In addition, the European Union is directly supporting the beekeeping sector through the National Beekeeping Programmes. These programmes, with a duration of three years, are co-financed by the EU and the Member States, with the aim of improving the production and marketing of beekeeping products. The measures financed include: the purchase of modern equipment, the fight against bee diseases, the repopulation of apiaries and the promotion of beekeeping products

In Romania, one of the most important sources of funding for beekeepers is the National Beekeeping Program (PNA). This program runs for three years and its main goal is to support beekeeping activities through concrete measures such as:

- Purchase of modern beekeeping equipment, including centrifuges, sweepers and frames.
- Purchase of medicines for the treatment of bee diseases, such as varroa.
- Restoration of bee populations through the purchase of queens and bee colonies.
- Promotion of beekeeping products and support for participation in fairs and exhibitions.
- Consulting and training for beekeepers, in order to adopt the best beekeeping practices.

Beekeepers practicing organic beekeeping benefit from additional subsidies through the Support Schemes for Organic Farming, managed by the Agricultural Payments and Intervention Agency (APIA). These beekeepers receive compensatory payments for converting to organic farming and maintaining this practice.

Discussions

In this section, the hypotheses are verified and discussed.

(H1) According to statistical data, honey has the largest share in all products sold by beekeepers, the hypothesis is true, as seen in Figure 5.

(H2) The local market is accessible for most beekeepers. The hypothesis is true, because 47% of respondents have chosen local market as way to sell their products, as seen in Figure 6.

(H3) Local market consumers are the main target customers, given that the local market is easily accessible to beekeepers. The hypothesis is true, as long as the most numerous clients are local customers, with a share of 42.4%, as seen in Figure 7.

(H4) Online advertising is the most accessible form of promotion, being cost-effective and having a large audience. The hypothesis is true because 40% of respondents have chosen the channel online for promoting their products, as seen in Figure 8.

(H5) Brand insignia or various certification labels can be used. The hypothesis is not necessarily true, as long as one third of respondents use the standards labels, without a specific brand.

Moreover, the beekeepers have been asked open questions, such as: What are the main challenges faced in selling your products? How do you assess the demand for beekeeping products? How do you set the price for beekeeping products? What distribution channels do you use for beekeeping products? Do you use online platforms for promotion? Have you tried selling beekeeping products on e-commerce platforms?

The answers to these questions demonstrate that the products are promoted on the local market to a significant extent, and the target audience is local consumers. The most effective methods of promotion were considered to be online advertising and recommendations. A very high percentage of respondents considered that the demand for beekeeping products on the local market is low. Prices are set according to supply and demand and production costs. More than 50% of beekeepers distribute beekeeping products through the short food chain. 30% of beekeepers use social networks for promotion, and 70% have not even tried to make sales through online

commerce. They also realize that if they were organized in associative forms they could penetrate and be more visible on the market. They want to be promoted nationally, through TV commercials. A major problem faced by beekeepers in Romania is the very low price of imported honey, and in this situation they can hardly resist the competition. Most of them promote their products on the local market. They also use social networks to make their products known, and a small part participates in fairs for agricultural products. A consumer awareness campaign regarding the quality of honey produced in Romania and its promotion by nutritionists through national media channels would be necessary.

Conclusions

The paper explores the perceptions of beekeepers about honey market in Romania, its main challenges and opportunities. Based on the research presented in this paper, it can be concluded that most honey producers in Romania want intensive promotion, highlighting the health benefits of beekeeping products. Although Romania is one of the largest producer and exporter of honey within EU countries, local market is the main sales market for Romanian honey.

As regards the promotion, beekeepers use mostly online and social media. One more instrument could be organic certification and its signaling on labels using EU specific logo for organic products.

The paper has its limitations, since the research gap in the context of the scientific literature has not been explored.

Further research should analyze the relationship between honey production and export and their impact on the local market. Moreover, the beekeepers' perception of subsidies and possible shortcomings of the support system may be investigated.

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