

# DonWay *by Don Honey*

## REAL HONEY FROM BEES



### The LAW

The British Government has set a legal standard for the composition of Honey "The Honey (England) Regulation 2015". It is a very long and complicated piece of legislation but it is worth reading. **In short**, it stipulates that honey is produced from the nectar of plants by Bees (*Apis mellifera*). If it has any other ingredients, then it is **NOT** Honey. To quote SCHEDULE 1 item 5 "No food ingredient has been added, including any food additive".

### The CONSUMER

Think of honey as a top quality chocolate and then consider a product (Adulterated honey that does not comply with the law) as cooking chocolate. Both products have their place in the market, but the consumer knows exactly what they are getting and pays the appropriate price. Consumers would not expect to spend as much for a top quality product if it were a lower grade and possibly inferior one. They would certainly expect to receive a product as described on the label. As a consumer, I am quite partial to a bar of cheap cooking chocolate, so with that in mind, there is probably a market for adulterated honey. I make this analogy because the issue may not be about taste, because that is not quantifiable, but that adulterated honey is more than likely to have added cheaper ingredients that the consumer is not aware of but is paying the higher price. At present consumers probably assume that if they buy honey, then it is as specified in law. The reality is that it is likely to be **adulterated**.

### Does it matter?

If you like cheap adulterated honey, then the answer is no. If you like honey that is not adulterated and has its' unique composition of potential antioxidant, antibacterial, antifungal and anti-inflammatory properties etc. along with the taste that is associated with the area it was harvested, then the answer is yes. Adulterated honey is produced throughout the world and is being sold in the UK as honey. Thankfully there is a campaign in England to scientifically detect this product, which one hopes will prevent it from being called honey. One of the main ingredient of adulterated honey is a sugar substitute that does not contain the natural components that give honey its unique composition.

### The TRUTH

It is widespread and accepted throughout the UK beekeeping community to feed bees on substitute products. This is often done when colonies are small and need this support to maintain survival. It is also done after harvesting honey in the autumn to ensure the bees survive the winter. This is something that I personally have done in the past, thinking that it was the right thing to do, and common practice. In doing this, the law has been broken if you then sell your future harvest as honey. This may seem very pedantic, because the bees will more than likely consume most of this additive over the coming months, however, this is when inadvertent adulteration occurs. It may be small, but this adulteration is a fact.



## Back to basics

Often overlooked by beekeepers, and also the public, is the basic principle of how and why bees produce an excess of honey. Firstly, **bees do not hibernate** but store honey in the hive and consume it during times when they cannot get out due to poor weather. They also **move the honey** to suit the brood laying space. So if additives had been given, then inevitably it would get mixed up with honey. Beekeepers therefore cannot guarantee that only honey is stored in the cells that they then harvest unless they categorically do not feed the bees any additives.

## Be aware

Honey will always granulate at some point. Some take longer than others depending on where the bees have been foraging. Honey that remains fluid might be a sign of it undergoing heat treatment, which degrades its qualities and is against the Honey Regulations SCHEDULE 1 item 8 (d) which states *"It must not have been heated in such a way that the natural enzymes have been either destroyed or significantly inactivated"*.

## The bigger picture

Small scale beekeepers cannot compete with a honey producing industry that is **volume and price driven** particularly if this industry is adulterating the product. But if beekeepers are allowed to have the sole use of the word **Honey**, then I hope this will maintain the mystery and mythology of the Golden Nectar. This would give true value to this **premium product** and give a level playing field in the sales market. There are already lots of types of honey categorized in the government regulations (chunk/comb/baker's etc.) that should give clarity to what is on offer to consumers, all of which clearly excludes any adulterated product. So my thought is that the word honey is excluded from any description of this industrial SYRUP. My gripe is that whilst we might applaud any action that is being taken by our government or beekeeping organizations to protect the name of Honey, and detect adulteration from imports, we must surely get our own house in order first, whether it be large producers or hobby beekeepers, and only produce Honey **as defined in law**.

## The figures

The National Bee Unit and many other reputable organizations and authors say that a typical colony of bees need between 18 – 22 kg of honey to sustain them through winter. That is an awful lot of added ingredient if the bees' own honey stores are low. A year long regime of maintaining a good level of honey within the hive should be a prerequisite to good beekeeping practice. If the bees' stores of honey go below this level, then the question to ask is **WHY?**

## What to do

If the level of harvesting honey is not excessive, then feeding inferior supplements should not be needed. There seems to be little information on how to maintain bees without this need to feed. A simple aid to this is a "KEEP" super box that is always present in the hive and never used as a honey crop, but just purely there for the bees own consumption. I have written an article on the KEEP concept which is available on my website.

## Guaranteed honey

Traceability is a big thing in food production, and having a five-star hygiene rating and my labelling being approved by the necessary authorities is just part of the picture. Recently I have marketed my honey as GUARANTEED because over the last three years it has **no added sugar**. I also extract honey throughout the season, so there are usually three to four batches per year, with each having its own unique tones. These are all factors that enhance the value of honey.

I just wish the bees could have the last word and say that their health and wellbeing is being impaired when given unnecessary additives.