



CBI
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

CBI Product Factsheet:

Organic honey in Germany

Introduction

Germany is the largest market for organic products and thus organic honey from developing countries is well appreciated by German buyers. Environmental concerns, together with an increasingly healthy lifestyle of German consumers, are the main drivers of the growing popularity of organic products. Make sure your organic claims are combined with an organic label or certification, since otherwise they will not be accepted.

Product description

EU label for organic honey:



Source: European Commission

This CBI product factsheet analyses the characteristics of the German market for organic honey. Organic honey refers to honey produced naturally, without the use of chemical substances in any part of the producing/processing/packaging processes. The EU has established an integrated regulation ([EC 834/2007](#)), which is mandatory for all member states, regarding organically produced products. It sets requirements for every stage of the production and processing. In addition, regulation [EC 889/2008](#) (articles 9, 13, 18, 19, 25, 38, 44, 47, 77, 78) incorporates several relevant factors for beekeeping, ranging from the natural treatment of bees' health issues to the colour quality of the containers for honey storage. In order to label your honey exported to the German market as organic, certification will be required.

Quality

Organic beekeeping differs from conventional beekeeping. Several methods in the different stages of honey production and processing are in place to guarantee that honey has been produced organically. Organic beekeeping incorporates the following procedures:

- Beehives should be placed in an area free from potential contamination sources (the EU advocates that the foraging radius for organic beekeeping must be 3km).
- Beehives should be made from natural materials, but you may also use corrugated or metal plates.
- Bees' health should be managed without the use of conventional veterinary products to control diseases such as antibiotics. Instead, you can use lemon juice to deal with mites, for example.
- Beekeepers should allow the bees to consume their own honey, during periods with less forage.
- Beekeeper cooperatives should introduce internal control systems for beekeepers' inspections.
- Honey should be stored in containers cleaned without chemical detergent or soap.

In several developing countries, beekeeping practices and consequently the honey that is produced is organic by default. However, German buyers do not accept the claim 'organic by default' and only recognise certified honey as organic.

Labelling

Labels of organic honey exported to the German market must include the following information:

- Name of the exporter
- Gross and net weight
- Date of minimum durability – 'best before'
- Any special conditions for keeping or use
- The name and address of the exporter
- Country of origin
- Lot marking with the marking preceded by the letter "L"
- Batch number
- EU Organic label

Packaging

Honey which is imported to Germany and is intended for industrial use is transported in bulk. Common packaging consists of steel or plastic drums of 200 litres. The drums must be painted on the outside and lined on the inside. Depending on buyer preferences, you can use beeswax or plastic bags (e.g. polyethylene) for lining.

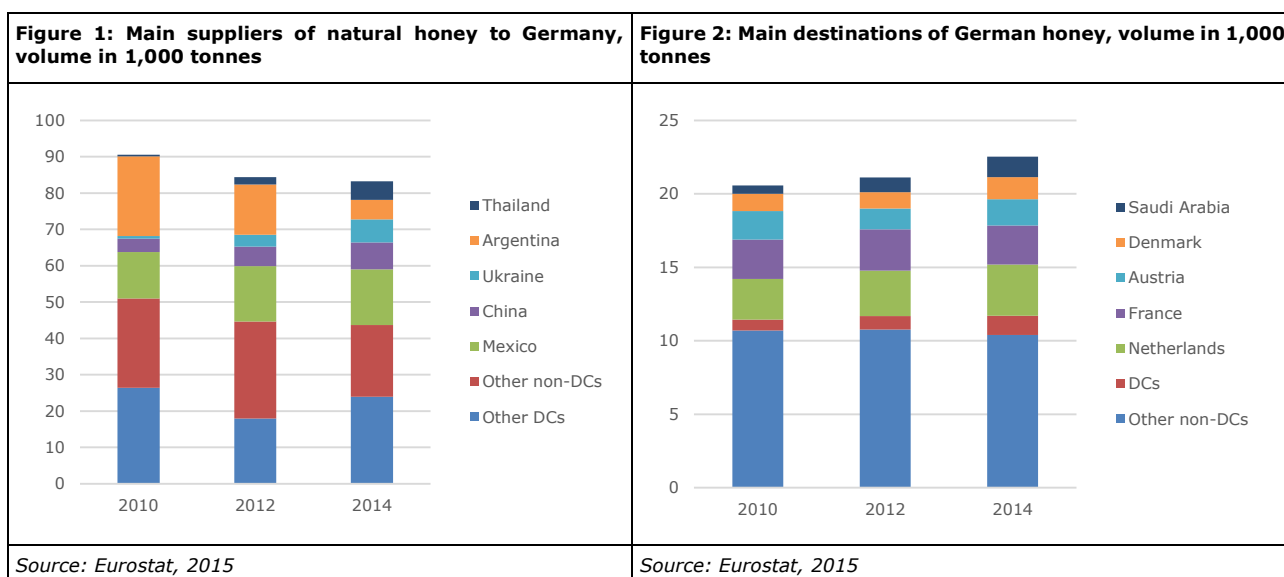
German buyers strongly prefer steel drums over plastic drums because of handling and quality. Due to the weight of honey, plastic drums may collapse when stacked. In practice, this also means that storage of plastic drums requires more space. Moreover, importers' equipment is not always suitable for plastic, which may break as it is less durable. Plastic is also more permeable, which means that honey is more easily contaminated by, for example, materials/liquids on the floor.

Tip:

- Make sure you have detailed packaging instructions from your buyer, as their preferences may differ from your standard packaging.

What is the demand for organic honey in Germany?

Since quantitative data for organic honey are not available, data on the overall German honey market as presented below will be complemented by a qualitative analysis of the German organic market.



German importers turn to new sources:

During the period between 2010 and 2014, German honey imports decreased by 2% annually to 83,000 tonnes (€235 million). The main cause of this development is the substantial decrease in imports of Argentinian honey. Loss of bee forage together with heavy losses of colonies resulted in a sharp drop in Argentinian honey production. It is important to note that a decade ago Argentina was among the largest global honey producers, but during 2010 and 2014 its exports to Germany recorded an annual decrease of almost 30% (in terms of volume).

The decrease in Argentinian honey production led to an increase in prices of honey from this source. It made Argentinian honey an unattractive option for German buyers. They partly turned to China, which offers very low prices. However, German importers are still reluctant to purchase from Chinese suppliers due to structural quality problems.

Ukraine has proved to be a good alternative. Especially since the EU introduced duty-free quota for Ukrainian honey, German importers have embraced Ukraine as a new supplier of low-priced honey. They have also increased low-priced imports from Thailand.

In the global market, Brazil is the largest supplier of organic honey. In 2014, Germany imported 1.1 thousand tonnes of honey from Brazil. A large share of this honey is estimated to comprise organic honey.

Tip:

- Argentina was traditionally the main supplier of honey to the German honey, and thus the sharp decrease in Argentinian imports offers room for new honey suppliers.

German honey exports destined for other mature markets:

Between 2010 and 2014, German honey exports increased slightly by 2.3% annually (in terms of volume), amounting to 23,000 tonnes (€105 million). Germany plays a key role in the European honey market and supplies significant quantities of both bulk, retail packed, conventional and organic honey to neighbouring countries.

High productivity of German beekeepers:

Germany plays an important role as a European honey producer. Approximately 110,000 beekeepers with a total of about 750,000 beehives produce honey in Germany. The German beekeepers and their bees are among the most productive in the world. In fact, each hive produces an average of 20-30 kg of honey per year. Overall, the German beekeepers harvest 15,000-25,000 tonnes of honey annually - equivalent to about 20% of consumption in Germany.

German production of organic honey is increasing, amounting approximately to 600 tonnes in 2013. In 2011, 3% of German beehives were estimated to be organically managed. The lack of suitable beekeeping areas is the major barrier to further expansion of organic production in Germany. Only a few areas in Germany are suitable for organic beekeeping, which requires an area with a 3 km radius of organic farming or nature.

Growing demand for organic honey:

Germany is the largest European market for organic food products in general, followed by France and the UK and other, mainly West European, countries. In the past five years, organic honey has continued to gain popularity, driven mainly by a search for healthy and natural products. Organic honey has become a mainstream product. Industry sources indicate that the German market for organic honey currently represents around 10% of the total honey market, amounting to 8-9 thousand tonnes. Most of them expect the market for organic honey to grow by another 5-15% in the next five years.

Tip:

- Gain access to the large and growing German market for organic honey through certification.

Refer to [CBI Trade Statistics for honey in the EU](#) for more information.

What trends offer opportunities on the German market for organic honey?

Organic honey becomes mainstream

The trend towards more healthy lifestyles stimulates the consumption of healthy, natural products and particularly organic products in Germany. Consumers not only appreciate the environmentally friendly production method, but also often perceive organic products as healthier than conventional products. They believe that organic products are more trustworthy than conventional products. For example, in the honey market, consumers are concerned about the presence of antibiotics in conventional honey.

Honey importers also contribute to the increased demand for organic honey. They are concerned about widespread and excessive use of (forbidden) antibiotics and other chemicals during beekeeping. Organic certification provides a certain guarantee that exporters are actively sourcing pure uncontaminated honey and beekeeping activities are being inspected.

Tip:

- Promote your organic honey as a natural product free from chemicals by showing pictures of the beekeeping areas. Additionally, gain trust from importers by explaining your organic beekeeping practices, such as treatment of bees.

Locally sourced VS imported and sustainable honey

German consumers are increasingly concerned about the environmental and social impact of their honey consumption. This stimulates demand for organic products, but it also stimulates demand for local production. By purchasing honey from local beekeepers, for example, consumers contribute to the reduction of CO2 emissions from long distance honey imports.

The threat to exporters in developing countries from the shift of some German consumers to locally produced honey is actually very small. German production of organic honey is and will remain small and insufficient to satisfy demand.

Tip:

- Emphasise the positive impact on the environment of organic beekeeping practices, such as pollination, promotion of organic farming and protection of natural vegetation.

Refer to [CBI Trends for honey in the EU](#) for more information.

What legal and non-legal requirements must my product comply with?

Complying with the following requirements is mandatory. Failure to demonstrate compliance to your buyer may jeopardise your entry into the German market.

EU food legislation:

Honey is predominantly used as food and thus the EU regulation for food applies here. The basis for all food legislation is set in the EU General Food Law ([Regulation \(EC\) 178/2002](#)). The legislation introduces general principles for food production, such as traceability, risk analysis and a precautionary approach. The legislation also sets out responsibilities and requirements for food business operators.

Tip:

- Familiarise yourself with the relevant regulation. Refer to the [EU Export Helpdesk](#) for more information.

Food safety:

EU legislation on hygiene of foodstuffs ([Regulation \(EC\) 852/2004](#)) is legally binding for business operators, such as honey processors. They must comply with General Hygiene Requirements, such as a clean production environment and personnel trained in hygienic handling of honey. They must also implement procedures based on Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles. Nevertheless, certification of HACCP is not a legal requirement. Additional documentation, such as health certificates, may be needed for customs.

Tip:

- EU buyers will often require their suppliers to implement a food (safety) management system based on HACCP principles. Read more about HACCP and health control in the [EU Export Helpdesk](#). To help you answer key questions about health control, refer to the [guidance document](#) of the EU.

Traceability:

In the case of food safety problems, EU legislation requires that consumers are informed and products are taken off the market. In order to enable this, the affected products must be identifiable and located quickly through a traceability system. The General Food Law requires EU food business operators, such as honey importers, to be able to identify each supplier of every batch of products. To this end, importers require their suppliers to label every batch. In case of a safety problem, members of the Rapid Alert System For Food ([RASFF](#)) network must inform the European Commission, which notifies the public.

Tip:

- Search in the EU's Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed (RASFF) [database](#) to see examples of withdrawals from the market and the reasons behind these withdrawals.

EU honey legislation:

[Directive \(EC\) 110/2001](#) sets definitions, labelling requirements and quality standards for honey, including composition criteria regarding fructose and glucose content, moisture content, hydroxymethylfurfural and other parameters.

Tip:

- Familiarise yourself with the relevant honey directive. Be sure to comply with the specific requirements, since non-compliance can result in refusal of supplies of honey by importers.

Organic certification:

Organic certification is a legal requirement for honey which is labelled 'organic'. The process for certification is described below:



- Honey processors apply for certification by filling in a detailed form, which describes in detail the methods used for honey production and processing.
- The certifier assembles the information and composes a risk assessment, which is based on the information from the application form. Then, the certifier proposes an offer and gives advice on the feasibility of certification.
- After the offer from the certifier and the negotiations between the interested parties, the certifier conducts an audit, to decide whether production complies with certification requirements. In areas with little human activity, the total process that leads to organic certification can be finished in only a few months.

The certification for [Organic Farming](#) incorporates organic practices in honey production, processing and distribution.

Tip:

- Contact a certifier in your country to obtain information on the costs and processes of organic certification or to acquire an application form.

What additional requirements do buyers often have?

The requirements listed below are common in Germany. Most of your competitors already comply with these requirements.

Documentation:

Especially when you present your company and products for the first time, German buyers appreciate clear and elaborate documentation on the products they import. Information that European buyers ask for usually includes:

- Product specifications (quality specifications, price indication, packaging)
- Production capacity (turnover, number of employees)
- Processing capabilities (certificates, quality management)
- Company structure (history, mission, vision and activities)

Tip:

- German buyers will appreciate a commercially oriented Product Data Sheet with photos, information on origin and bibliographic references, where available.

Samples:

German importers will usually send samples of the honey to an EU accredited independent laboratory for analysis before authorising the shipment. Most honey samples are handled by a few laboratories, such as [Intertek](#) (Germany) and [QSI](#) (Germany). German importers require analysis of samples from each batch of honey. This implies that exporters with a small homogenisation capacity of less than 20 tonnes will need to supply multiple samples per shipment.

Quality analysis by the honey suppliers is not adequate proof of the quality of honey. Therefore, European honey buyers will demand a quality analysis conducted by an independent authority, such as the laboratories mentioned above.

Tip:

- Ensure delivery of honey supplies exactly according to the specifications of the sample submitted earlier to prevent disappointment or even refusal by the buyer.

Quality and safety management:

German buyers frequently require certificates regarding the quality and safety of honey. This complements legal requirements for food safety and hygiene. HACCP is one of the most commonly used certificates in Germany, providing the company with a risk management tool which is used to manage food safety risks. ISO 22000 is a more demanding certification scheme to demonstrate to clients that a food safety management system is in place. BRC and IFS are quality management systems which are only required by a few buyers.

Tip:

- Collect information on certification requirements to assess your readiness for implementation of the management system before you invite an auditor of the certifier.

DIB Industry Standard:

The German Beekeepers association (DIB) has set an [industry standard](#) which stipulates additional requirements concerning the quality of German honey. More specifically, quality criteria such as moisture content, diastase activity and Hydroxymethylfurfural (HMF) content are stricter than the European Directive on Honey.

Tip:

- The DIB standard is not a mandatory requirement. However, since it is an industry standard, German buyers will likely ask you to comply with the additional requirements. Make sure you familiarise yourself with the additional German requirements for honey quality.

What are the requirements for niche markets?

Comply with the requirements below to gain access to specific market segments.

Corporate social responsibility:

Corporate social responsibility is one of the ways for companies to differentiate themselves in the market. A CSR policy usually consists of environmental and social aspects. For example, honey exporters can recycle waste and improve the safety for employees at the processing plant. Environmental management systems may be based on the international standard [ISO14000](#), but certification for this is commonly not required in the honey market. Similarly, [OHSAS18001](#) regarding occupational health and safety and [SA8000](#) regarding social conditions can provide a solid basis for improvement of social conditions, while certification is optional.

Tip:

- German buyers appreciate initiatives in the area of corporate responsibility. However, this does not automatically translate to certification requirements. German buyers appreciate the systems and procedures in place, more than an actual certificate.

Fairtrade certification for organic honey:

Increasingly, German consumers are concerned about the impact of their consumption patterns on working conditions of producers and local communities. Therefore, honey which is both organic and [Fairtrade](#) certified is becoming increasingly popular. The [standards](#) of the Fairtrade Labelling Organisation (FLO) include the following requirements:

- Contracts between buyers and suppliers must stipulate an arbitration mechanism
- Traceability through documentation
- Buyers must establish sourcing plans
- The Fairtrade payer must provide 60% of the contract value to the producer as pre-finance
- Minimum prices and premiums
- Differentiation between A and B quality honey (minimum quality is based on EU legislation and resembles standards in conventional trade)

Tip:

- If you are considering acquiring a Fairtrade certificate, refer to the website of Fairtrade International, the official Fairtrade organisation. For the certification requirements please refer to the website of the certifier [FLOCert](#). For more information on the German Fairtrade market refer to [Fairtrade Deutschland](#).

Naturland Fair:

The Association for Organic Agriculture (Naturland) was funded in order to promote organic farming in Germany and worldwide. Since 2010, Naturland has also offered a fair trade certification, combining in essence organic farming, social responsibility and fair trade. The addition of a fair trade certificate comes from Naturland's conviction that ecological conservation is directly connected with economic sustainability.

Tip:

- For more information on the fair trade certification, please refer to the [Naturland](#) website. Look for Naturland Fair certified honey companies inside Germany but also in other European countries in the company's [partner list](#).

What competition do I face on the German market for organic honey?

Organic by default:

In a lot of developing countries, traditional beekeeping practices are 'organic by default'. This means that beekeeping practices are organic, but not certified. In these countries, the certification process only consists of the introduction or elaboration of an administration system (including a traceability system) and an inspection by the certifier. This is a very short, simple and cost-effective process to gain access to the market for organic honey.

Tip:

- Find out if beekeepers in your area apply organic beekeeping practices by default and if they can become certified.

Industrial users not as reliable as consumers:

Industrial users can often substitute organic honey by other organic cheaper sweeteners, such as sugar, maple syrup or agave syrup. Consumers of organic table honey are generally more conservative in their purchasing patterns. Even though other natural organic sweeteners are available, consumers continue to prefer honey over other sweeteners, as they perceive honey as a more authentic, natural and sometimes even healthy choice.

Tip:

- Offer very competitive prices to convince importers and the users of industrial honey to purchase your organic honey.

Brazil is the main player:

Brazil is rapidly expanding its supplies of organic honey. In recent years, it has converted a large part of its honey production to organic production. Currently, Brazil dominates the global market for this honey. However, prices of this organic honey are relatively high (€3/kg) and the USA is competing for this honey. In 2014, only around 10% of Brazil's honey production was exported to Europe (FAOstat, 2015) and a third of that was destined for Germany.

Mexico, the main supplier of honey to Germany, only produced around 1,150 tonnes of organic honey in 2011. Argentina has become a much smaller honey supplier to Europe and the widespread use of GMO crops prevents the country from becoming a major supplier of organic honey to Germany.

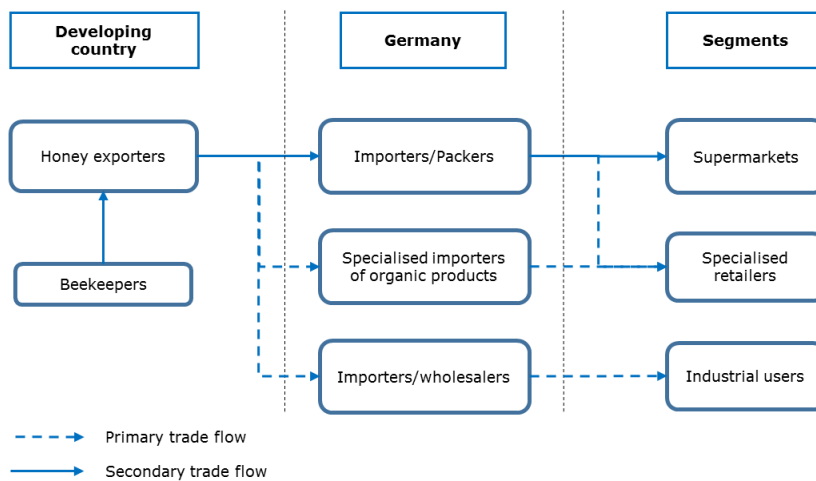
Tip:

- Monitor developments in Brazil to anticipate market developments.

Refer to [CBI Top 10 Tips for Doing Business with European Buyers and CBI Competition](#) for more information.

What do the trade channels and interesting segments look like in the German market for organic honey?

Figure 3: Trade channels for organic honey in the EU

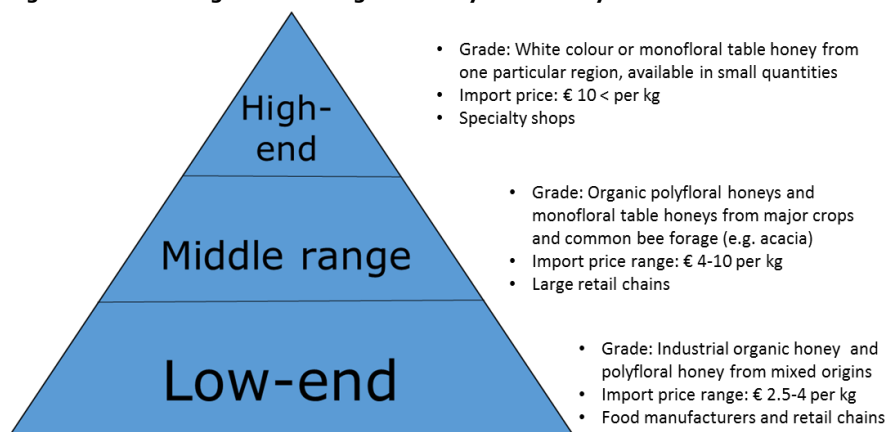


The above figure shows the three distinct trade channels for organic honey in Europe:

- The main trade channel consists of the importers who import and pack honey, directing it to the consumer market through large retailers. The majority of organic honey in the EU is being traded through this channel.
- Organic honey directed to specialty shops and all-organic shops represents a small share of the market and is indicated as a secondary trade flow.
- Honey for industrial use is imported by the importers/wholesalers, who subsequently sell it to industrial users in the food industry.

Segments

Figure 4: Market segments for organic honey in Germany



Within the German market for organic honey, there are different segments, depending on the honey's quality, origin and use. In the low-end segment, organic honey is usually destined for industrial use, as an ingredient for the confectionery and baking sector. This honey is often polyfloral and not of high quality. However, since organic certification is becoming mainstream, industrial honey is increasingly certified.

In the middle range segment, organic honey is destined for the consumer market through large retail chains. Within the high-end segment there is a niche market of organic Fairtrade certified honey, which is gaining importance in the German market. In 2013, Germany purchased 33 tonnes of organic certified and Fairtrade honey.

Finally, the high end segment of the market includes exclusive organic honeys such as monofloral honeys of high quality, destined for specialty shops and shops with only organic products.

Tip:

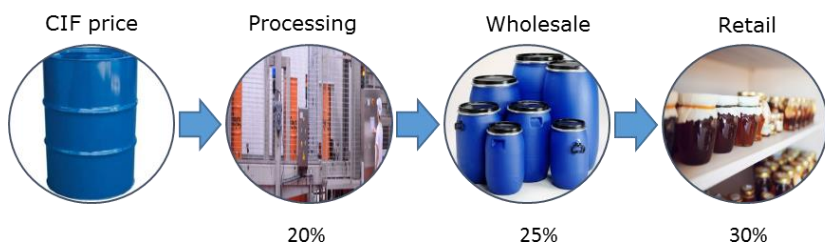
- Refer to [CBI Channels and segments for honey in the EU](#) for more information.

What are the end market prices for organic honey?

Organic honeys receive a price premium ranging between 10% and 15% on top of the conventional honey prices. This premium is under pressure since the prices of conventional honey have increased. This development has taken place over the past 10 years.

Current FOB prices on the global market for polyfloral organic table honey are around €3/kg.

Figure 5: Price breakdown



Source: ProFound, 2015



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