

ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

Honey consumption in Europe with especial regard to Hungary

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Abstract

Nowadays it is extremely important for agricultural production, food industry and trading to follow the continuously changing consumer behaviour. Price plays a very important role in consumers' decisions, but other factors also influence the final decision. In addition to it, one of the most important questions of the successful marketing activity of enterprises operating in food industry is to know the latest trends in consumer behaviour.

The inadequate knowledge of high quality Hungarian honeys on our most important export markets and also in Hungary supports the importance of the ongoing research. The main objective of this research is to develop a medium-term marketing strategy for Hungarian honey that could serve as a basic for product policy decisions and common marketing steps, as well.

Key words: market research, honey consumption

Introduction

The main objective of the paper is to explore the main consumption patterns of the bee honey in Europe and more detailed survey of Hungarian consumption characteristics as a special country in Europe, where the production is very large, but the consumption is in relative low level. Our aim is to explore the main influencing factors in the Hungarian consumption: why is it on relative low level in comparison for example with Germany although the quality of the Hungarian honey is among the best of the world.

Material and methods

Primary and secondary research methods were used for data collection and evaluation, as the most internationally accepted ones. Within the framework of the secondary research, restructuring and evaluation of the available data were carried out (Hajdú and Lakner, 1999). Within the framework of the primary research a questionnaire was created and used for data collection. The flexibility of questions ensures that this method is one of the most popular ones in primary research (Kotler and Keller, 2006). The main aim of this survey was to analyse honey consumption in the 3 main cities (Debrecen, Szolnok and Nyíregyháza) of the North-Great Plain Region. Altogether 902 people were asked randomly (200000, 110000, 120000 inhabitants respectively). The questionnaire contained open and composed questions. In some cases ranking from 1 to 5 had to be done by the asked people. Data collection was carried out in supermarkets and fruit and vegetable markets of the above mentioned cities. In addition to it, a special shop for selling honey, called "Mézkuccó" was also involved in Debrecen. From the 902 questionnaires filled 81 was not suitable for further evaluation. Regarding the representativeness of the sample, age, sex and qualification were asked and analyzed. In all cases the figures of the sample were compared with the relevant figures of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO) figures. The representativeness can be considered as "good" in most of the cases.

Results and discussion

Honey consumption in the European Union

Between 2002-2006 the EU25 consumed approximately 24 per cent of the world's annual honey production. Total EU consumption of honey amounted to 305 thousand tonnes in 2004, see Table 1.

Table 1. Consumption of honey in the EU in 2002-2006, thousand tons

	2002	2003	2004	2006
EU25	290.7	298.8	305.0	-
Germany	91.3	96.1	83.2	90.0
Spain	31.8	34.8	40.2	-
UK	32.7	27.9	31.1	32.0
France	29.9	27.8	29.2	-
Italy	18.3	18.9	20.1	25.0
Greece	16.0	-	17.0	18.0
The Netherlands	5.3	9.0	6.8	-

Source: I2

Honey has four main applications which also form market segments: honey for direct consumption, honey as an ingredient in products, industrial honey and honey as a raw material for mead. An estimated 85 per cent of all honey is for direct consumption. It is also this segment in which organic honey has a major market. Between 2002 and 2006, consumption of honey increased by 2.4 per cent annually. An important factor contributing to the growth of the market is the health trend in which honey has a role as a natural health product. The fact that honey is a natural product and has therapeutic as well as medicinal properties appeals to many EU consumers who are becoming more health-conscious.

Honey consumption in Hungary

Position of honey in the consumption structure

Changing of consumption habits contributed to the appearance of new diseases (e.g. cancer, diabetes, heart diseases, etc). This trend has been continuously ongoing for the last few decades. At the beginning these so-called civilisation diseases became more and more common in the developed countries only. Nowadays these diseases reached the medium developed countries, as well. At the same time the trend changed in the developed countries and the number of such diseases is dropping (Bíró, 1990; Szakály, 1994). Honey is not only a sweetener for people nowadays, but even more: important part of nourishment since it includes almost all the important elements, such as vitamins, minerals etc. that is needed for our health. Quality of Hungarian honey is excellent in comparison with honey produced in other countries of the world (II). The market position of honey unfortunately is not stable enough, the branch has a lot of problems, for instance the fact of counterfeit of the product. Of course, there is a demand from consumer side for excellent quality Hungarian honey, but shopping is mainly carried out in hypermarkets, where lower quality is available at a very cheap price.

Main findings regarding honey consumption preferences

In this point the following questions were analysed: do the asked people consume honey? If yes: how often; what kind of honey they know and what their main purchasing criteria are.

Frequency of honey consumption

Frequency of honey consumption in the studied area is occasional. Although people who don't like honey very much, consume it occasionally. Detailed analysis of the sample has already been carried out by cross tables. With the help of these methods common occurrence of two variables can be demonstrated (Ketskemény-Izsó, 2005). Cross tables were created according to sex, age, qualification and income. Data coherences were analysed through Pearson Chi² statistical method. Special attention was taken into consideration of results under $p = 0.05$ (5 per cent significance level). Results of cross tables analysis can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequency of honey consumption based on the different variables (n = 902)

Variables	Consume every day (per cent)	Consume weekly (per cent)	Consume monthly (per cent)	Consume occasionally (per cent)	Never consume (per cent)	Significance (Pearson- Chi ²)
Distribution according to Age						<i>.014</i>
Age 18-25	8	18	16	41	17	
Age 26-35	13	20	17	41	9	
Age 36-45	15	22	20	34	9	
Age 46-60	14	32	20	29	4	
Age above 60	20	18	23	31	8	
Distribution according to Sex						<i>.148</i>
Women	16	25	19	34	6	
Men	16	26	26	14	18	
Distribution according to Place of Residence						<i>.096</i>
Village	8	23	16	44	9	
City	15	22	19	34	10	
Distribution according to Qualification						<i>.005</i>
University/ College	15	29	17	32	7	
Secondary School	13	21	19	37	10	
Elementary School	20	4	28	38	10	
Distribution according to net income/person/month						<i>.300</i>
Below 60 th HUF	14	16	21	38	11	
61-100 th HUF	14	26	18	33	9	
101-150 th HUF	12	25	19	36	8	
151-200 th HUF	25	21	14	32	8	
Above 201 th HUF	25	13	13	38	11	

Source: own research, 2008

Analysing the sample according to age, there was a significant difference between the different age groups. It can be stated, that older population consume honey more often (even every day), than younger generation. Number of people who never consume honey is the highest in the age group 18-25 (18 per cent), and the number of people who consume honey very rarely is the highest in the age group 18-25 and 26-35 (41-41 per cent respectively in each group). Analysing the sample according to qualification, there was a significant difference in the results. In each category most people consume honey only occasionally. The ratio of people consuming honey every day is the highest in case of people with elementary school qualification (20 per cent). Analysing the sample according to sex, there was no significant difference there. Most of women (34 per cent) consume honey only occasionally, but most of men consume honey weekly or monthly (26-26 per cent). Analysing the sample according to the place of residence, there was no significant difference, too. It even can be said that most people living in villages and towns (44-3 per cent respectively) consume honey rarely, but people living in towns consume more often honey, every day (15 per cent) than people living in villages (8 per cent). Analysing the sample according to the net income/person/month there was no significant difference. It

even can be said that people with higher salary consume more honey every day. It can be summarized that older people with higher net income/month consume more often honey. The sex and place of residence don't influence the frequency of honey consumption. Analysing the sample according to any of the variables, most people (30-40 per cent) consume honey only occasionally.

Knowledge of different types of honey

In this part of the questionnaire people were asked to give the name of 3 different types of honey. Three different groups (acacia, flower and other types of honey) were created, based on the answers. Analysing the sample it can be stated that knowledge of acacia and flower types of honey is the dominant. Most people (80 per cent) named acacia honey on the first place. Flower honey was named on the second place (60 per cent of people) and other types of honey were named on the third place (90 per cent of people). We have to emphasize the fact, that people who consume honey regularly know only acacia and flower honey. Analysing the sample according to age, sex and income there was no significant difference regarding the knowledge of different types of honey. However, there was a significant difference regarding the place of residence ($p=0.010$). People living in towns named the other types of honey on the first place more often (6.5 per cent) than people living in villages (2.6 per cent). Reason for that could be the wider supply of supermarkets in towns. Analysing the sample according to qualification, people with lower qualification named other types of honey on the first place more often (38 per cent) than people with higher qualification.

How do the properties of honey influence the purchase?

In this part of the questionnaire people were asked to rank the different properties of honey according to their effects on buying. People could rank these properties in a scale of 1 – 5. Mark 1 meant “least important”, mark 5 meant “most important”. The most important properties are the taste (4.54) and quality (3.78) of honey. In addition to it, colour (3.42) was also important for buyers. It can be explained with the fact, that different types of honey has different and special colour. For instance acacia honey has light-yellow colour, while the colour of flower honey is darker, etc. Value of standard deviation was less than 1 only in the case of taste; in case of other properties the values were higher. There was another question in the questionnaire connecting to this point. We asked people what comes to their mind about the word “honey”. Results were as follows: bee and bruin (35 per cent), health and life (11 per cent), nature (8 per cent) and honey products (8%).

Conclusions

A lot of research were carried out in the last century those confirm that health of the consumer is strongly influenced by his/her dietetic habits (Szakály, 2002; Molnár, 1991; Bíró, 1999; csapó, 1999). Market research confirm that healthy consumption trend is coming more and more popular not only in Hungary, but in most countries of the world (Töröcsik, 2006). Based on the above mentioned facts it is interesting, that the excellent quality honey with outstanding health prevention ability plays so small part in the consumption in Hungary. Results of our research also confirm it. Based on the evaluation of the questionnaires the main findings, are as follows:

- There are several types of honey produced in Hungary, but people don't know too much about them; they consume only a few of them.
- Mainly the so-called traditional acacia and flower honey are consumed.

- Analysing the variables we didn't find significant differences in the different groups; the frequency of honey consumption was just occasionally.
- Older people with higher net income/month consume more often honey.
- In case of people living in towns the knowledge of other types of honey (not only acacia and flower honeys) was better, because the wider supply of hypermarkets.
- The most important criteria when buying honey are taste, colour and quality. Less important criteria are the quality and size of packaging and as well as the name of the producer.
- Honey as a word is more connected to health than diseases. Consumers have to be informed about the positive properties of honey, like its health prevention ability.

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