

A close-up photograph of a glass jar filled with golden honey, tilted on a white surface. In the foreground, a wooden honey dipper with a handle and a cylindrical body with horizontal ridges is shown, with a thick layer of honey dripping from its end onto the white surface. The background is softly blurred, showing more of the jar and the white surface.

POLSKA...
tastes good!

Higher Payments for Farmers?

New rules on payments for farmers are among the European Commission's proposals for the EU's 2014-2020 perspective.

One of the proposals aims to reduce differences in direct payments per hectare of farmland among EU countries. As a result, the countries which now have the lowest payment rates would receive slightly more money at the expense of those who have the highest payments. At present, Belgian farmers, for instance, get 435 euros per hectare, while Latvian farmers only 95 euros. Polish farmers, with payments at 214 euros per hectare, or 80 percent of the EU average, are in the middle of the table.

Under the proposed rules, after 2013, direct payments per hectare would be growing in Poland every year and by 2020 they would be around 10 euros higher than in 2013 and close to the EU average. The highest increase in payments will be recorded in the Baltic states—by around 30 percent to 163 euros. At the same time, payments in countries such as Belgium will drop by almost 30 euros per hectare.

Direct payments for farmers were introduced in 1992 as part of a reform of the Common Agricultural Policy

(CAP) and became the main support instrument in agriculture. The purpose of direct payments was to compensate farmers for a drop in their income caused by a major decrease in guaranteed prices.

The CAP reform plan adopted in Luxembourg in 2003 introduced significant changes. The new payment system, decoupled from production, replaced most of the direct aid existing until that time. It also introduced the principle of cross-compliance—to receive payments, farmers now have to maintain their farmland in good agricultural and environmental condition and respect regulations on public, animal and plant health, and animal welfare.

The reform continued in the following years, with changes introduced in 2004 to the tobacco, hop, cotton and olive oil sectors, in 2005 to the sugar sector, and in 2007 to the fruit and vegetable sector. The main objective of the changes was to introduce uniform forms of support based on aid decoupled from production.

A political agreement reached in November 2008 on CAP Health Check was a continuation of the Luxembourg reform. The EU adopted measures aimed at further decoupling direct aid from production by 2012.

Today, there are generally two types of single payments in the EU: Single Payment Scheme (SPS) and Single Area Payment Scheme (SAPS). The SPS is used in the EU15 and two new member states, Malta and Slovenia. SAPS, applied only in new member states, is a simplified form of the direct payment scheme.

Payments in new member states are subject to phasing-in, which means they are gradually raised to reach the EU15 level. Additionally, Poland decided to use Complementary National Direct Payments (CNDP) every year at the maximum level permitted by EU regulations.

The level of direct payments for Polish farmers has been growing every year since 2004. In 2010, it amounted to 100 percent of the aid granted to EU15 farmers—70 percent from the EU budget and 30 percent in supplementary payments from national sources.

In 2004-2010, supplementary payments from national sources were paid to Polish farmers growing basic crops such as cereals, oil and high-protein crops, producers of hop, potato starch, tobacco, and fodder crops grown in permanent grasslands—animal payments available since 2007. Additionally, Polish farmers have received sugar payments from the EU budget since 2006, as a consequence of the reform of the sugar market, as well as tomato payment and payment for soft fruit for processing since 2008. The last two types of payment were introduced as a result of the 2007 reform of CAP on the fruit and vegetable market.



A.R.

Honey Made in Poland

Even though Poland is a top producer of honey in Europe, Polish people eat less honey than many other nations. Still, demand for this sweet and healthy product has increased markedly in the past several years.

Poland's rich beekeeping tradition dates back many centuries. Poland used to be called a land of milk and honey not without a reason, but even though the most prosperous times for beekeeping, or apiculture, in Poland are long over, honey is still regarded as a natural and valuable food product. It contains vitamins and enzymes that are not found in any other natural foodstuffs, fresh or processed by living organisms.

Bees produce natural honey from flower nectar and honeydew, which is a substance secreted by aphids feeding on trees. Nectar or honeydew starts turning into honey, or maturing, inside bees and then the process continues in honeycombs. Honey maturation involves water evaporation and a string of biochemical reactions, such as enzymatic hydrolysis of sucrose into glucose and fructose. Fresh honey has the thick consistency of syrup and crystallizes in storage.

Mature honey is a highly nutritive and dietary product. While it is not very rich in vitamins, it contains large quantities of easily digestible simple sugars, organic acids, enzymes, mineral salts (salts of calcium, potassium and magnesium) and inhibin, a substance that hampers the growth of microbes. All these components give a therapeutic quality to honey, honeydew honey in particular.

The flavor and smell of honey and its chemical composition depend on the type of nectar and honeydew it originated from, the method used to extract it from honeycomb (cold and hot methods) and the stage of maturity. Flower honey is usually made from the nectars of many different plants, but apiarists are also able to obtain varieties where the nectar of just one plant species is in prevalence. This kind of honey is collected from beehives as soon as a given honey plant ceases to bloom. Such varieties are named after the plants they are made from. These include spring rapeseed, heather, buckwheat, acacia, linden, clover, raspberry and so on.

Most honeydew honey in Poland is made from fir and spruce trees, while honeydew honey from broad-leaved trees is a rarity. Honeydew from coniferous trees contains therapeutic substances used to treat respiratory diseases. Honeydew honey is usually dark with a hint of green or gray and seems a little dusty. It is almost black when liquid and brightens up when it crystallizes. Honeydew honey from broad-leaved trees tastes unpleasantly, while varieties obtained from coniferous trees have a mild flavor with a slightly resinous quality. Honeydew honey varieties have a



high content of a complex sugar called melezitose, which is almost completely absent from nectar honey.

There are over 40,000 apiarists in Poland and the number of bee families has been recently estimated at around 1 million. Poland produced around 18,000 metric tons of honey in 2009, while in the following year the production volume declined to 16,000 tons. Although with so many bee families and high production Poland ranks among top honey producers in Europe, the annual consumption of honey in Poland is lower than in most European countries at an average of 0.6 kilograms per capita. In comparison, Greeks eat 3.5 kg of honey a year, Austrians 2.5 kg, and Germans around 2 kg. The figure in Poland is on the rise nonetheless and has almost doubled over the past two decades.

The popularity of honey and apicultural products was certainly augmented by a nationwide campaign called Honey-Sweetened Life from 2007-2009. Funded by EU funds in 50 percent, the campaign aimed to encourage Polish people to eat more honey and stop treating it as a seasonal product eaten mostly in autumn and winter. The campaign highlighted the taste and nutritive values of honey and advised consumers about the beneficial properties of all apicultural products.

A considerable obstacle preventing honey from being more popular are its relatively high prices. Depending on the variety, honey costs between zł.15 and zł.50 per kilogram. Imported honey is usually cheaper, as it mostly comes from China and Ukraine where it costs less to produce. The quality of such honey is not always up to scratch. Imported honey is also sold as blends of honey from different countries, usually labeled as "a blend of honey produced in EU and non-EU countries." Sometimes honey of inferior quality imported from the Far East is mixed with Polish honey and marketed as "made in Poland" or "made in the EU."

No article about Polish honey could be complete without a mention of mead, which is a traditional alcoholic beverage obtained through the fermentation of honey wort, usually linden honey wort. Mead has been made in Poland for well over a millennium. The special character of traditional Polish mead stems from a strict adherence to proportions between water and honey in the wort. The finest variation, the *póltorak*, contains two units of honey for each unit of water in the final product.

In 2008, the European Commission registered Polish mead among products covered by the Traditional Specialty Guaranteed label.

A.R.

Regional and Traditional Products

Drahimski Honey Protected in EU

Miód drahimski, a variety of honey from Poland's West Pomerania province, has been given Protected Geographical Status across the European Union.

In June, the European Commission registered *drahimski* honey as Protected Geographical Indication. The registered *Miód drahimski* brand encompasses five different varieties: heather, buckwheat, rapeseed, linden, and multiflower honey. All have to be produced at apiaries in four districts of the Drawskie Lake District, Czaplinek, Wierzchowo, Barwice, and Borne Sulinowo along with the Borne Sulinowo forest division.

The high-quality *drahimski* honey stands out with its high main-pollen content and an admixture of pollen from relic and endemic plant species. One of the main features of the multiflower variety is a rich diversity of different kinds of pollen where none of them exceeds 35 percent in terms of content. This explains why the honey has an exceptionally rich flavor.

The word *drahimski* is derived from Drahim, the historical name of Stare Drawsko, a local village. The region's old beekeeping tradition is evidenced by historical records, copies of old documents and other sources. Surviving documents indicate that back in 1565, there were 11 beekeepers in the Drahim district. The area is now part of the Drawsko Scenic Park, which abounds in all kinds of plants, with countless sites rich in pollen, nectar and honey dew. These include vast moor lands, beautiful alleys lined with old linden trees, black locust groves and fields of spring rapeseed and buckwheat which cover the land in yellow and red.

Drahimski honey is made by almost 200 beekeepers who cultivate the tradition of this dying profession. This tradition, coupled with the clean environment and the exceptionally good conditions in which the bee families are kept, make the *drahimski* honey a product of the finest quality.

The honey owes its special qualities to the local climate and soil, which favor the region's characteristic plants, including linden trees, buckwheat, rapeseed, heather and a wide variety of woodland and meadow plant species. All of those are highly productive honey plants.

The color of liquid *drahimski* linden honey ranges from greenish yellow to bright amber. After crystallization, the color changes to anywhere between whitish and golden yellow. The taste is strong and often a little bitter.

Buckwheat honey is dark brown, almost black, but brightens when crystallized. It has the intensive and pleasant scent of buckwheat flowers and a distinctive, sweet and slightly hot flavor.

The color of multiflower honey depends on the time when it was collected and ranges from bright cream to pale yellow. When the honey crystallizes, the color changes slightly to bright gray or bright brown. This type of honey has a strong scent which is slightly reminiscent of beeswax. The flavor varies depending on the composition of the nectar it was made from, but it is usually mild and sweet.

Sometimes the nectar of one plant, such as linden, buckwheat or acacia, prevails.

Liquid rapeseed honey is almost colorless or straw-colored with a hint of green, depending on the plant species the nectar was collected from. Crystallized, it becomes white or cream-colored. Heather honey occurs in bright and dark hues of pale yellow and amber all the way to reddish amber when liquid and yellowish orange to brown after crystallization. Its strong scent resembles that of heather, while the taste is lightly sweet, strong and a little bitter.



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Focus on Food Safety

By **Marek Sawicki, PhD,**
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Agriculture, rural development and fisheries have been incorporated into the general priority of the Polish presidency of the EU, which is “Safe Europe—Food, Energy, Defense.” In this way Poland is highlighting how fundamentally important food safety is to EU citizens and the special role of the reformed Common Agricultural Policy.

In the ongoing debate on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy and increased competitiveness of European agriculture, we will point out that it is necessary to support projects which aim to develop renewable energy sources in rural areas and promote efforts which seek to stimulate the production of energy from agricultural by-products and waste generated by the food and agricultural industry.

As regards the Common Fisheries Policy of the EU, our presidency will seek to work out an institutional framework to help the EU develop a sustainable fishing sector and ensure sustainable and responsible management of fish species in the long term. We will also work on a new European Fisheries Fund and fishing quotas for 2012.

As far as the Common Agricultural Policy is concerned, I believe that for the sake of European agriculture, the policy should be thoroughly reformed so it becomes simpler and revisits its foundations. Such changes will not, however, be accomplished by the *European Parliament Resolution on the Common Agricultural Policy Towards 2020: Meeting the Food, Natural Resources and Territorial Challenges of the Future*, also known as the Dess report, after European Parliament member Albert Dess who prepared it. I believe that many provisions in the document stand in opposition to the government stance adopted Feb. 4 this year on the *Commission Communication on the Common Agricultural Policy Towards 2020: Meeting the Food, Natural Resources and Territorial Challenges of the Future*. To begin with, the resolution rejects the idea of a flat direct area payment rate across the EU which, in my opinion, would best correspond to current and future goals of the Common Agricultural Policy. The flat rate would also ensure equalized support for farmers in all EU member states, a step that needs to be taken.

According to Dess, the departure from the disadvantageous direct payment system which leads to inequalities and is based on outdated historical criteria should be a gradual process with transition periods. The Dess report maintains a “tunnel” concept for direct payments where each member state is guaranteed a certain minimum percentage of the

average payment in the EU. This contradicts the Polish proposal to equalize direct payment rates across the EU.

The necessity to abandon the currently used Single Area Payment Scheme (SAPS) in favor of a Single Payment Scheme which is based on entitlement to payments may turn out to be another major disadvantage. I am convinced that the SAPS is more efficient than SPS as a multi-level direct payments system of the kind proposed in the Commission Communication. The idea of introducing entitlements to the payment system is particularly hard to accept for Polish farmers, as it contradicts the plans to simplify the Common Agricultural Policy.

I am also worried by proposals to link the discussions on new criteria for support distribution in the first and second pillars and by provisions which call for redistribution of second-pillar resources and a fair division of funds relying on objective criteria while preserving a “pragmatic approach.” Since it is vital to further reduce discrepancies in rural development across the EU, I believe that the present criteria on the division of funds in the second pillar should remain.

The document, in turn, provides for maintaining support for less favored areas in the second pillar, which contradicts the idea of simplifying the Common Agricultural Policy and may serve as an argument for differing levels of support in member states.

The resolution also drops the idea for a new EU system of export loans which could become an important tool when the EU has to discontinue export payments, a move necessitated by the EU’s international obligations.

Still, the report compiled by Eurodeputy Dess is just a document and no binding decisions have been made so far. We still have some time to work out a reasonable compromise on the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. This can be done provided that European politicians forget about any coming elections and national interests and instead concentrate on the single agriculture sector in Europe and on how to make it more competitive. Only then can Europe have a single and genuinely Common Agricultural Policy equipped with modern mechanisms capable of quickly and efficiently facing any threat that emerges. Backed by such a policy, European agriculture will be able to compete on the global market.

It is high time we all stopped paying merely for being ready to produce, as that is conducive to stagnation. Now is the time to pay more attention to innovation and rural development.