

'Bees starving' in disastrous year for French honey

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Coming up empty: French beekeepers are having a 'black year'

Beekeepers across France say it has been a disastrous year for honey, with bees starving to death and production plummeting by up to 80 percent.

Mickael Isambert, a beekeeper in Saint-Ours-les-Roches in central France, lost 70 percent of his honey and had to feed his colonies sugar to help them survive after a cold, rainy spring.

"It has been a catastrophic year," said Isambert, 44, who looks after 450 hives.

A beehive typically produces 15 kilos (33 pounds) of honey a year, but this time, Isambert said his farm had only produced between five and seven kilos.

When it rains, [bees](#) "don't fly, they don't go out, so they eat their own honey reserves," said his co-manager and fellow beekeeper Marie Mior.

Low temperatures and [heavy rainfall](#) have prevented bees from gathering enough pollen, and flowers from producing nectar—which the insects collect to make honey.

'Some died of hunger'

Bad weather has affected honey producers countrywide, with spring production dropping by 80 percent in some regions—figures that summer harvests will struggle to offset, said the French national beekeeping union (Unaf).

Rainfall rose by 45 percent on the yearly average, Unaf said in a letter to its local branches.

"With weather conditions that have been catastrophic in many regions with abundant rain... and [low temperatures](#) until late, many beekeepers' viability is under threat," said Unaf.

Temperatures stagnated below 18 degrees Celsius (64 Fahrenheit), the

minimum temperature needed for flowers to produce nectar, said Jean-Luc Hascoet, a beekeeper in Brittany in western France who lost about 15 colonies.

"For some of my colleagues it was worse," he said.

"In June, the bee population increases and the needs of the colonies grow but as nothing was coming in, some died of hunger," said Hascoet.



Full and empty honeycomb frames from the same hive at La Ruche des Puits in Saint Ours in central France.

'Black year'

French [beekeepers](#) had already been reeling from dealing with several seasons of scorching heat and delayed frosts, according to Unaf president Christian Pons, making this "black year" even worse.

"Ten years ago, I made one and a half to two tons of honey per site, compared to 100 kilos today," said Pons, a [beekeeper](#) in the southern Hérault region.

Honey makers earlier this year protested against "[unfair competition](#)" by foreign producers, which led to the government releasing five million euros (\$5.6 million) in aid.

French consumers eat on average 45,000 tons of [honey](#) per year, about 20,000 tons of which is produced in France, according to the left-wing Peasants Confederation union.

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