

HuffPost Green

Tons of Unrecognizable Honey

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Some excellent investigative **research** last week uncovered some startling facts: In excess of three quarters of the honey sold in U.S. grocery stores is unrecognizable and would fail to be deemed honey by the United Nations' Codex *Alimentarius*, European Union and the European Food Safety Authority.

What's at stake is not just a couple hundred million forgone taxable dollars a year by the U.S. Customs Service but rather the health and safety of the American people.

Each year the **incomparable honeybee** produces 2.65 billion pounds of honey -- nature's golden elixir. In America we consume over 330 million pounds of honey per annum. It's baked into everything from breakfast cereals to cookies and mixed into sauces, beverages, processed foods and even cough lozenges.

Nature conscripted bees over 100 million years ago to be the predominant pollinators on Earth. Exquisite flowers loaded with sugar-rich nectar entice bees with a food; which they dehydrate, add some special enzymes and turn into honey. Honey is analogous in caloric energy to rocket fuel. In return bees inadvertently carry electro-charged pollen from one flower to the next and cross-pollinate the lions share of plants around the globe. They, incidentally, require some of that pollen to grow their young, build incredibly ingenious brains and healthy autoimmune systems.

In so many different ways the bees are also acting as nature's canaries in the coalmines. Of the 100 crop species providing 90 percent of the world's food -- about 74 percent are pollinated by bees. The bees are the first critters to touch and help make our food; they are getting sick all over the world and prematurely dying by the billions. Clearly, something is **terribly wrong here**.

Almost 2.7 million hives in the U.S. produce on average 66 pounds of honey a year. In 2010, we produced about 176 million pounds of honey. Over the past 18 months we have **imported** more than 210 million pounds of honey, of which 60 percent came from Asia, mostly China, in addition to about 45 million pounds from India.

The honey market in America is valued at **\$12 billion**. China is the world's largest honey producer.

In 2001, the U.S. Department of Commerce accused the Chinese honey industry, rightfully so, of dumping inexpensive, subsidized honey into the American market at well below the U.S. beekeepers production costs. And the U.S. Federal Trade Commission imposed stiff import tariffs or taxes to prevent the Chinese from further flooding our domestic honey market.

Unfortunately, some humans are nefarious and where there is a will there is a way. Millions of tons of honey that's currently either on U.S. supermarket shelves or in our pantries has been micro-filtered to remove any traces whatsoever of pollen or wax from the beehive. Not only does it fail the standard of even being considered honey; but also worse -- without these essential and healthful micro-ingredients, the honey cannot be traced to its country of origin.

Dastardly tactics that have skirted the U.S. Customs Service have essentially removed the fingerprints of honey. Instead of being able to identify the country of origin as China, a flurry of honey has coincidentally entered our nation from countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan and the Philippines -- countries that do not face the punitive tariff that was imposed in 2001 on China.

U.S. Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) has been aware of this for a number of years and has been leading the **charge** to help protect U.S. beekeepers and introduce legislation to provide greater enforcement power at port-of-entry customs offices.

There's a lot more at stake here than just illicit honey laundering and hundreds of millions of dollars. This heinous crime is one that affects our health and wellbeing. In the past, **Chinese toys** have poisoned our children and **tainted pet food** has inflicted slow and excruciating deaths of our domesticated animals.

Chinese honey is not safe. Chinese beekeepers are known to use banned North American antibiotics to keep their bees healthy. The

bees touch our food first and those carcinogenic chemicals are turning up in honey sold in the U.S. In addition, duplicitous packers are cunningly masking acid notes of poor quality honey by mixing it in sugar or corn-based syrups to feign good taste.

In 2002, 154,000 pounds of Chinese honey contaminated with chloramphenicol, banned in Australia, Canada, Europe, New Zealand and the United States because it treats anthrax but is known to cause bone marrow failure through aplastic anemia -- turned up in our grocery stores, unknowingly. **A half a million loaves of bread** were baked with chloramphenicol-laced honey and sold in the U.S.

Unadulterated honey is a powerful antiseptic; that's why it's used on bandages. Honey is renowned for its antibacterial properties and sealed jars recovered from Egyptian's royal tombs were found unspoiled, after thousands of years. Honey is loaded with vitamins and minerals in specific concentrations that miraculously mimic human blood serum. Honey metabolizes easily and can be an important source of essential nutrients as well as a tremendous source of caloric energy.

Lawmakers must act unanimously and swiftly to protect Americans from potentially tainted micro-filtered Chinese honey. The brazen gall and effrontery to short-circuit our health and food security must be stopped -- now!

In the meantime, I strongly suggest supporting our local beekeepers. Make it a family day (or a romantic outing) and Google local beekeepers; visit their farms or farmers markets and buy their honey.

*Earth Dr. Reese Halter is an award-winning science communicator: voice for ecology and distinguished conservation biologist at California Lutheran University. His latest books are **The Incomparable Honeybee** and **The Insatiable Bark Beetle**. **Contact Earth Dr Reese Halter**.*

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