



Cooperative Extension Service  
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

## Honey Marketing Survey<sup>1</sup>

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Although somewhat out of date, much of the information presented here is still valid. The most recent data is available from The National Board at <http://www.nhb.org>.

Dr. Sabry Shehata, Associate Professor, Agricultural Economics, California State University, Fresno reported the results of his study into honey consumer characteristics and attitudes at the January, 1985 meeting of the American Beekeeping Federation in Tampa, Florida. The results should be of interest to both large- and small-scale honey marketers.

The purpose of the study was to: (1) determine consumer's awareness and preferences for honey products, and (2) determine characteristics of the consumers' demand for honey at U.S. markets. Results show several interrelated factors influence demand for honey: (1) disposable income, (2) price of honey compared to competing sweeteners, (3) customs and habits of the buyer, (4) size and racial composition of the buying public, and (5) availability of substitutes. Demand can realistically be expected to increase because over the last ten years, U.S. per capita honey consumption averaged about 21 ounces, lower than Canadian (32 ounces), Austrian (50 ounces), Japanese (96 ounces) and West German (140 ounces) consumption.

Methodology used was querying a random sample of households in four major U.S. representative cities (Dallas, TX; Washington, DC; Sacramento, CA; Kansas City, MO-KS). The sample size was 964; questionnaires were used as the principle research tool. The survey was completed in October, 1984. Specifically, frequency of use, per capita consumption, seasonal use, honey characteristics, and purchase location were examined.

### Frequency of Use

Most persons surveyed used honey in 1983 as follows: Dallas (60%), Washington (71%), Sacramento (66%) and Kansas City (77%). Although this appears high, according to Dr. Shehata, in all places only 30% of consumers used honey once a week or more frequently, according to Table 1.

Other findings are: (1) honey use increases with household income and with education level, (2) Mexican-Americans use less honey than other ethnic groups; (3) singles consume more honey than marrieds because they eat out more often. Main reasons for not using honey appear to be: (1) consumers have no use for it and/or haven't thought about it; (2) consumers don't like the taste, and (3) consumers avoid honey because of medical advice.

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**Table 1.** Results of a study into honey consumer characteristics and attitudes.

CITY	HIGH USER Once a week or more	MEDIUM USER Once every two weeks to once a month	INFREQUENT USER Once every two months or rarely	NON USER More than a year ago
Dallas	27%	18%	15%	40%
Washington	27%	22%	21%	29%
Sacramento	27%	34%	37%	34%
Kansas City	33%	23%	21%	24%
U.S. Average	30%	21%	16%	33%

**Table 2.** Per capita consumption of honey.

CITY	NUMBER	PER CAPITA	STANDARD ERROR	FOR CONFIDENCE INTERVAL	
				LOW	HIGH
Dallas	317	30.0 oz.	4.6	20.8	38.9
Washington	199	18.6 oz.	3.0	12.7	24.6
Sacramento	229	21.5 oz.	3.8	13.9	28.8
Kansas City	212	22.5 oz.	3.8	14.9	30.0
Total	961	23.8 oz.	2.0	19.8	27.9

**Per Capita Consumption**

Estimated per capita consumption of honey in sampled households was 23.8 ounces per year, with a standard error of plus or minus two ounces (expected range is from 19.8 to 28 ounces). Per capita consumption for each city is shown in Table 2.

**Seasonal Use**

Eighty-three percent of those consumers using honey in 1983 reported no particular seasonal preference. Those reporting a seasonal use,

however, indicated honey to be used mostly in winter.

**Honey Characteristics**

Dr. Shehata's data show the most popular type of honey for the U.S. consumer is liquid honey. A small percentage (6%) of persons purchased cream honey in 1983. When the product is promoted, as in Kansas City, consumption of creamed honey appeared to increase, according to the study.

Consumers also prefer gold colored honey over amber or yellow colored honey, which are considered too strong or not strong enough

respectively. Clover and orange were the most recognized varietal honey types, followed by sage and alfalfa.

### **Location of Purchase**

Most honey is purchased in the supermarket (74%), according to the study. About 10% of consumers buy honey directly from beekeepers.

### **Rating Honey Attributes**

Attitudes between buyers and nonbuyers of honey are significant. Buyers responded more positively to the following attributes:

- 1) Honey is easy to use.
- 2) Honey is healthy.
- 3) Honey is priced reasonably.
- 4) Honey is a good source of energy.
- 5) Honey improves food flavor.
- 6) Honey is good for children.
- 7) Honey is good for adults.
- 8) Honey tastes better than jelly/jam.
- 9) Honey tastes better than syrups.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Dr. Shehata concludes that there are two key factors which will contribute to increasing demand for honey and honey products: (1) expose consumers to as many uses of honey and honey products as possible, and (2) cater to preferences regarding honey container size and different varieties present in the marketplace.

He also suggests that older consumers (60 years of age and over) may be singled out as lower honey

consumers, that single unit families are also lower consumers than married couples or families with two or more members using honey and finally, high income groups eat more honey than those with lower incomes. Therefore, the present honey consumer, according to the study, is an average sized family with medium to high income, whose members' ages lie between 24-60 years. This appears to be consistent throughout the U.S.

Two findings in Dr. Shehata's study might bear more examination. The overwhelming preference of gold colored honey and liquid honey by the consumer should come as no surprise. They are by far the most offered products available to the consumer. The question invariably arises, however, whether the marketplace determines this preference by offering higher proportions of these products, rather than this being a well researched consumer preference. There may be far more room for different honey products and varieties than supposed, if only they were out there for the consumer to purchase. The fact remains that often they are not.

It also is not surprising that most honey is purchased in supermarkets. Because there is so much traffic in supermarkets, it is difficult to convince many that more shelf space for honey and honey products is required. In some areas, marketers may actually have to purchase space in stores. Perhaps the easier markets to crack, therefore, are local stores that aren't part of national chains. They are smaller, cater to a more limited clientele and competition for shelf space is not as intense.