

TAILPIECE

THE MARKETING OF HONEYED WORDS

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The marketing of crystallised honey has been a problem for many years, and will remain a problem unless we do something about it. Perhaps the most positive action taken in recent times is the use of a special label on each bottle explaining that crystallisation is a natural process, this followed by instructions on liquifying granulated honey. This is an excellent idea, as it reassures our public that they're not buying an adulterated product. Provided of course that more beekeepers use this supplementary label and provided that the consumer reads the little label in the first place, it should be successful. But it's likely that we'll still be asked: 'Why does this honey look like gravy - is it stale?' or 'Is this honey pure? It's got sugar in it!'

Perhaps we're using the wrong words. Look at the words crystallisation and granulation. The first sounds like some chemical process in a laboratory - hinting at human tinkering or some other unnatural process. As our most important buyer, the housewife, requires a basic knowledge of physical science to appreciate the subtleties of crystal formation, might we not be presuming too much of her - or the sales assistant handling her complaint?

The word granulation is particularly unpleasant on the ear - it hints of granules or grit, as well as the

crunchiness of the sugar that many consumers suspect the beekeeper of adding to the honey.

Is there not some other term we could use? This would be the question asked by any copywriter when advertising a 'problem product'. Let's face it - honey is a problem product. And this is very much an advertising matter - the label on a honey jar being the only effective advertising that our industry relies on.

Fortunately we have not far to look. The answer came to light in an EPBKA newsletter, issued by Mike Challen. The term he used there was set honey, and reference to several English language bee journals shows that it is in regular use in the British Isles and in New Zealand, and is probably as old as the hills. It fits the bill perfectly because it is short, non-technical and conveys a process which is natural, inevitable and part of the maturing process of honey. Gone forever is any suggestion that 'something has been added' to the product.

Why not use this term on the special sticker for a honey that is liable to set? And while we're about it, let's avoid the use of language like: 'Honey is a concentrated solution of sugars...'. Scientifically speaking, honey is indeed a mixture of sugars. But we should remember that, to the average non-beekeeper, the word sugar refers to the white crystals he sprinkles over his porridge each morning. And this is just what we don't want the honey-buying housewife to think that we're putting in our honey!

So let's eliminate the word sugar from our language altogether. Our special label could now read: 'Honey is a natural blend of concentrated glucose and fructose which, in time, may set to form a non-liquid ...etc'.

We should also take a long, hard look at the terms used on labels printed in Afrikaans. Two words are in current use and, unfortunately, both of these appear to hint at adulteration - to an even greater degree than English!

The first of these is versuikerde, meaning sugared or crystallised. As the stem of the word is suiker, meaning sugar, dare it be suggested that the continued use of the term is doing the image of honey a mischief?

The second term is even more ambiguous - sandsuiker heuning. Considering that this means 'granulated sugar honey', need we ever wonder why beekeepers are regarded by some honey buyers as crooks? Even the literal translation into 'sand sugar honey' conveys a grittiness that would put the sensitive buyer's teeth on edge! Apart from this, should we be advertising on behalf of the sugar barons?

Can an alternative term be found? Hunting through an Afrikaans/English dictionary brings gestolde heuning to light. Applied to honey, this would mean that it has 'solidified, set or congealed'. Would this not have something in common with the English term set honey - conveying the idea of a maturing, natural process and free of adulteration? Let's work on it!

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