

# The Farmers' Chronicles

BLOG

18 December 2025



## Protecting Bees, Beekeepers and Buyers: National Department of Agriculture (DoA) Cracks Down on Fake Honey

Counterfeit honey is more than just an unethical product on a store shelf, it endangers public health, undermines the credibility of genuine beekeepers, and jeopardises South Africa's beekeeping industry. The national Department of Agriculture (DoA) is aggressively enforcing laws to ensure that honey sold in South Africa is authentic, safe, and accurately labelled. Operating under the Agricultural Products Standards Act, 1990 (Act No. 119 of 1990) and under the mandate of the Directorate: Inspection Services, the department conducted a joint compliance and enforcement operation aimed at curbing the selling and distribution of counterfeit honey and syrup misrepresented as honey.

As part of the department's continued mandate, this operation will continue to operate nationally. Part of this initiative included conducting inspections in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality in the Eastern Cape by agriculture inspectors, in conjunction with the South African Police Service (SAPS). These inspections revealed wide-spread non-compliance resulting in hundreds of units of counterfeit honey being confiscated and removed from store shelves.

Retailers found to be in violation of the law were issued with compliance notices and directed to immediately correct their violations. These actions have protected consumers from continued deceit and clearly communicated that deceptive practices in the honey market will be prosecuted. The Agricultural Products Standards Act, 1990 (Act No. 119 of 1990) governs the quality, composition, labelling and advertising of agricultural products sold in South Africa. The primary purpose of this Act is to protect consumers from mislabelled products, safeguard food safety, and promote equitable competition within agricultural supply chains. There is no product that exists as honey-based syrup under the Act.

Therefore, a product is either honey or it is syrup. To legally sell a product as honey, it must meet the standards for pure honey as established by the Act. The enforcement of this law is necessary to prevent confusion among consumers, to protect them, and to prevent illegal or misrepresented products from competing against compliant producers. Enforcement of the law by the national Department of Agriculture is a crucial function to protect market integrity and foster consumer confidence.



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For legitimate beekeepers, counterfeiting honey creates unfair competition. Legitimate honey producers require considerable time, skills and financial investment to produce genuine honey; however, counterfeit products are frequently sold at lower prices and misrepresented as honey. This type of competition erodes the legitimacy of compliant producers and compromises their livelihoods. Counterfeiting honey affects not only the individual beekeeper. A thriving beekeeping industry is fundamental to pollination activities that are crucial to crop production and food security. The introduction of counterfeit honey into the market reduces confidence in the beekeeping industry and exerts pressure on the pollination process that is essential to agriculture and environmental sustainability.

Consumer involvement is crucial to protecting the honey market, and consumers can contribute to identifying legitimate honey at home through a few simple methods when shopping. Pure honey typically has a thick consistency and flows slowly when poured. Honey may crystallise as it ages, particularly if stored in cooler environments. Pure honey will possess a distinct aroma and flavour profile as well, as opposed to a sweet and uneventful experience.

One easy method to determine whether honey is genuine involves the "water test." When a spoon of honey is placed in a glass of water, genuine honey will tend to settle at the bottom of the glass, whereas counterfeit honey will rapidly dissolve. A second test is to place a small amount of honey onto a sheet of absorbent paper. Genuine honey will maintain its thickness and will not readily spread, whereas counterfeit or diluted honey will permeate the paper. While these tests do not provide conclusive evidence that a product is genuine honey, they can assist consumers in making educated purchasing decisions.

Shopping for honey from reputable retailers or directly from recognised local beekeepers remains the most effective method to minimise the risks associated with purchasing counterfeit honey. Pure honey is a naturally produced product made by bees without added sugars or syrups. Pure honey is comprised of natural enzymes, antioxidants and trace minerals, and has been utilised by humans for generations due to its taste and for medicinal purposes. The colour, flavour and texture of honey can vary greatly depending on the source of the nectar collected by the bees, and this variation is indicative of the natural differences present in South Africa's diverse landscapes and ecosystems.

While the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality was a focal point for the initial compliance and enforcement operation, the national Department of Agriculture has confirmed that similar operations will continue to occur throughout the country. This ongoing commitment is part of the department's larger objective to protect consumers, support compliant producers and uphold standards in the agricultural sector. The national Department of Agriculture is urging all retailers and traders to check their stock and make sure that every product being sold as honey meets the full legal requirements for honey in South Africa. DoA is encouraging all beekeepers and producers to uphold high-quality standards in production and to report on any illegal practices they become aware of. The department is also reminding consumers to remain vigilant when purchasing honey, to check the labels for authenticity, to question suppliers about the origin of the honey they sell them, and to contact the department directly if they suspect a product has been made from false honey or has misleading information on the label and therefore does not meet legal requirements for honey in South Africa.

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Members of the public are encouraged to report any suspected fake honey or honey products that do not meet the requirements of the Agricultural Product Standards Act. For further information or to lodge a report, please contact Mr Gilbert Mediroe at (012) 319 6078 email: [gilbertm@nda.agric.za](mailto:gilbertm@nda.agric.za)

### -Prince Mtsweni-

