Export is most formidable challenge of Iran's apiculture: *Businessman*

30% rise in honey output predicted for current year

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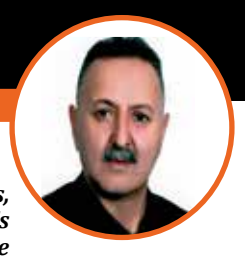
INTERVIEW



Abdolreza Bigonah

The beekeeping industry and honey production in Iran, on account of climatic diversity, expansive vegetative cover, and the country's four-season nature, possess unparalleled capacities for both production and exportation. Iran, at present, resides among the four foremost global producers of honey, and Iranian honey, due to its superior quality, singular flavor profile, and medicinal properties, has secured a distinctive position within international markets. From the slopes of Sabalan mountain and the Zagros mountain range in the nation's northwest and west, respectively, to the plains and pastures of the north and south, myriad botanical species have facilitated the production of diverse natural honey varieties within Iran, many of which enjoy worldwide renown.

Nevertheless, practitioners within the beekeeping sector contend that this domain confronts numerous challenges, including diminished export volumes, the depressed domestic price of honey relative to production expenditures, escalating costs associated with colony maintenance, and furthermore, the repercussions of sanctions and regional tensions. Under such circumstances, the expansion of exportation and the provision of support to beekeepers could assume a pivotal role in preserving Iran's global honey markets, augmenting foreign currency earnings, and revitalizing this industry.

In this very context, Abdolreza Bigonah, president of the Iran Beekeepers and Honey Producers Association and a member of the Board of Directors of the Ardabil Chamber of Commerce, Industries, and Mines, during an exclusive interview with Iran Daily, announced a forecasted 30% increase in honey production for the current year and maintains that, contingent upon support for production and the expansion of exportation, the nation's beekeeping industry could transform into one of the paramount foreign currency-generating sectors of the non-petroleum economy.

In this interview, while elucidating the state of honey production and exportation, he addressed the challenges confronting beekeepers, the export capacities of honey and bee byproducts, the global standing of Iranian honey, and furthermore, the issues pertaining to pricing and production costs. You will read the full text of this interview below:

IRAN DAILY: What is your prediction regarding the state of honey production in the current year, and what circumstances did the nation's beekeeping industry endure during the previous year?

BIGONAH: It is projected that, owing to the promising precipitation patterns during recent months, honey production in the current Persian calendar year of 1405 (started March 21, 2026) will increase by approximately 30% relative to the previous year, attaining approximately 130,000 metric tons. The previous year's production conditions were not particularly favorable because honey production in the southern provinces of the country experienced a significant reduction due to dust and particulate matter, and this very matter impacted the nation's total production volume. For this reason, during the previous calendar year of 1404, the nation's aggregate honey production did not exceed 100,000 metric tons. Of course, Iran possesses substantial capacity within the domain of honey production. The unparalleled diversity of medicinal flora, climatic variation, and the four-season nature have resulted in the production of a wide spectrum of natural honey within the country, and, if the requisite support is provided, the capacity for even greater production exists, and, within a short-term multiyear period, the nation's honey output could readily reach a minimum of 200,000 metric tons per annum.

What is the status of honey consumption and exportation in Iran, and what constitutes the most significant challenge facing the nation's beekeeping industry?

Annually, approximately 60% to 70% of domestically produced honey is consumed within the country, with the remainder being exported. During the previous year, however, due to sanctions and issues that arose late in the year consequent to the war on Iran and regional tensions, exportation did not occur at a sufficient level.

At present, exportation represents the foremost challenge for honey producers within the nation. Should the declining trend of exportation persist, the beekeeping industry will sustain severe damage because, in the absence of exports for surplus production, the domestic selling price of honey will remain depressed, and this matter will, over time, progressively weaken the beekeeping industry and obliterate the international markets for premium Iranian honey. This situation stands in contrast to the fact that honey exportation constitutes a highly promising arena for market development and revenue generation for Iranian producers and merchants. Through increased exportation, one could achieve foreign currency earnings, greater employment, market expansion, and superior recognition within global markets. Furthermore, the exportation of this product facilitates the development of the honey industry and its ancillary industries, in addition to enhancing added value.

A beekeeper inspects his bee colony in one of Iran's mountainous region, which have become popular for beekeeping.
IRNA

Iranian honey is ordinarily exported to various countries within the Middle East, South and East Asia, Europe, and North America. Previously, a substantial portion of exports was directed to Persian Gulf littoral states such as Qatar, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Bahrain. However, due to the wartime conditions within the region, this trend has diminished, and presently, Iraq and countries such as Indonesia in Southeast Asia constitute the primary export destinations for Iranian honey.

What specific impacts have climatic changes and environmental factors, such as drought and extreme heat, exerted upon honey production, and what measures have beekeepers undertaken to resolve these difficulties?

The Iranian beekeeping industry has, for many years, suffered from severe climatic difficulties. Consecutive droughts and diminished precipitation have destroyed natural vegetative cover and have severely restricted bee nutritional sources. On the other hand, climatic changes have altered the flowering periods of plants, and this issue has directly disrupted the nutritional cycle of colonies and, consequently, honey production volumes. Extreme heat and temperature fluctuations in certain regions have furthermore escalated colony mortality rates. Under such conditions, beekeepers have been compelled to undertake lengthier and more costly migrations to locate regions possessing adequate vegetative cover. Additionally, many of them have been forced to employ supplementary feeding to preserve hives, a circumstance that, alongside the high cost of inputs and equipment, has imposed an additional burden upon producers.

The photo shows a large shop in Ardabil Province, northwestern Iran, that sells dozens of honey varieties and other bee products.
BALAD

> Iran, due to its climatic diversity and expansive vegetative cover, is regarded as one of the world's richest nations in the production of diverse natural honey varieties. From the Zagros and Alborz mountain ranges to the northern, southern, and eastern plains of the country, there exist numerous species of medicinal plants and wildflowers from whose nectar bees produce honeys possessing unique characteristics and various therapeutic properties.

What constraints have escalating economic difficulties and production costs created within the market for the beekeeping industry and honey production?

The difficulties of the beekeeping industry are not confined merely to the production stage; furthermore, the chaotic honey market represents a serious concern for producers. One such issue is the proliferation of adulterated and low-quality honey within the market, which, on one hand, diminishes consumer trust and, on the other hand, inflicts losses upon legitimate producers. Moreover, the increased cost of transportation, necessitated by longer migrations to locate superior regions, imposes a greater financial burden upon beekeepers. The high price of sugar and required inputs has also severely elevated the final production cost of honey.

Exportation difficulties, likewise, prevent beekeepers from benefiting from foreign markets. The diminished purchasing power of the populace has furthermore reduced demand for high-quality, authentic honey, confronting producers with a sales stagnation. Nevertheless, as I have explained, Iran, due to its climatic diversity and varied vegetative cover, possesses substantial capacity for the development of beekeeping and non-petroleum exports, provided that planned and targeted support is extended to this industry.

What is Iran's global standing in honey production, and what factors have rendered Iranian honey recognized within international markets?

Iran ranks among the first three or four honey-producing nations globally, and, within Iran, the provinces of West Azerbaijan, East Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Fars, Kurdestan, Isfahan, and Mazandaran are considered among the most important honey-producing regions in the country.

Natural Iranian honey, on account of its superior quality, singular flavor, and botanical diversity, has a distinctive position within global markets. Iran, due to its climatic diversity and expansive vegetative cover, is regarded as one of the world's richest nations in the production of diverse natural honey varieties. From the Zagros and Alborz mountain ranges to the northern, southern, and eastern plains of