

## Canadian Megatrends

### Let's talk honey



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- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| .              | not available for any reference period   |
| ..             | not available for a specific reference period  |
| ...            | not applicable   |
| 0              | true zero or a value rounded to zero   |
| 0 <sup>s</sup> | value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded |
| <sup>p</sup>   | preliminary  |
| <sup>r</sup>   | revised  |
| x              | suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the <i>Statistics Act</i>                                   |
| <sup>E</sup>   | use with caution   |
| F              | too unreliable to be published   |
| *              | significantly different from reference category ( $p < 0.05$ )   |

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# Let's talk honey

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## CANADIAN MEGATRENDS

Nearly every home in Canada has it and you can also find it on the counters of your favourite coffee shop. Some claim it has medicinal qualities; most agree it tastes sweet. Let's talk honey.

Statistics Canada has been tracking the production of honey in Canada since 1924, when 22,205 beekeepers tending 280,010 honey producing colonies produced 16.8 million pounds of honey. Ontario accounted for about two-thirds of production in 1924, while Quebec accounted for one-quarter.

### Beekeepers aid the war effort

During the Second World War, the number of beekeepers rose from 27,150 in 1940 to 43,340 in 1945. Over the same period, the number of honey-producing colonies rose by one-third to 522,530. There were several reasons for this increase. Beeswax was a key component in making ammunition belts for the war effort. Also, sugar was rationed in Canada in 1942 and some people turned to honey as a substitute. While there was an uptick in the number of beekeepers and colonies, honey production remained similar to prewar levels.

The decade following the war saw a drop in the number of colonies, beekeepers and production, and by the mid-1950s all three were at record lows.

### Honey production moves west in the 1960s

Honey production picked up in the late 1950s. It was also at this time that production started shifting to Western Canada. By the 1960s, the Prairie provinces were producing twice as much honey each year as Ontario, with Alberta emerging as the most important honey-producing region in the country. New beekeeping techniques were partially responsible for the shift in production to the West, but another reason is that bee colonies on the Prairies were considerably more productive.

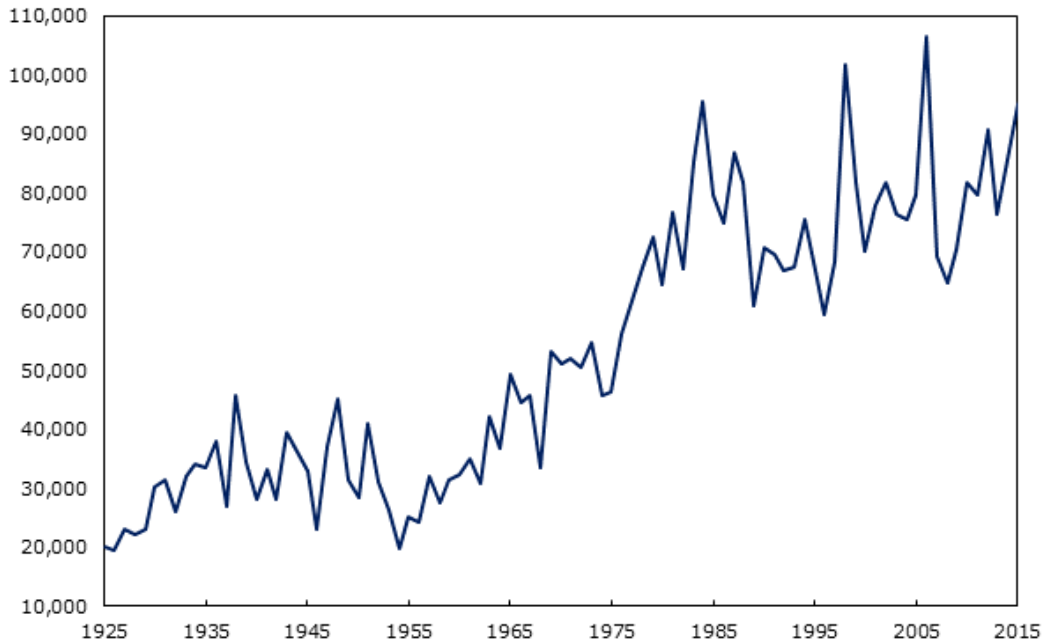
For example, from 2010 to 2014, annual honey production in Canada averaged 124 pounds per colony, led by Saskatchewan (192 pounds), Manitoba (176 pounds) and Alberta (126 pounds). Average yields in Manitoba were twice those in Ontario (86 pounds) and Quebec (81 pounds) and more than three times those in British Columbia (55 pounds).

### A golden age of honey

Honey production peaked in the 1980s, and in 1984 a then record 95.5 million pounds were produced, up threefold from the mid-1950s. From 1970 to 1983, the number of beekeepers more than doubled to 21,210, while colony numbers rose by three-quarters to a record high of 707,375 in 1986.

**Chart 1**  
**Honey production in Canada**

thousands of pounds



**Source:** Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 001-0007.

## **The varroa mite plagues honey production**

In 1989, varroa mites—a parasite that is one of the leading causes of bee mortality—first appeared in Canada, resulting in the lowest production totals in over a decade. By 1991, the number of colonies had fallen by one-third from 1986 to 498,780, while the number of beekeepers was also down by one-third to 13,096.

The higher costs associated with controlling the pest led to an exodus of beekeepers, especially part-time beekeepers, from the industry throughout the 1990s and into the mid-2000s. By 2008, the number of beekeepers had fallen by almost two-thirds from the mid-1980s to a record low of 6,931.

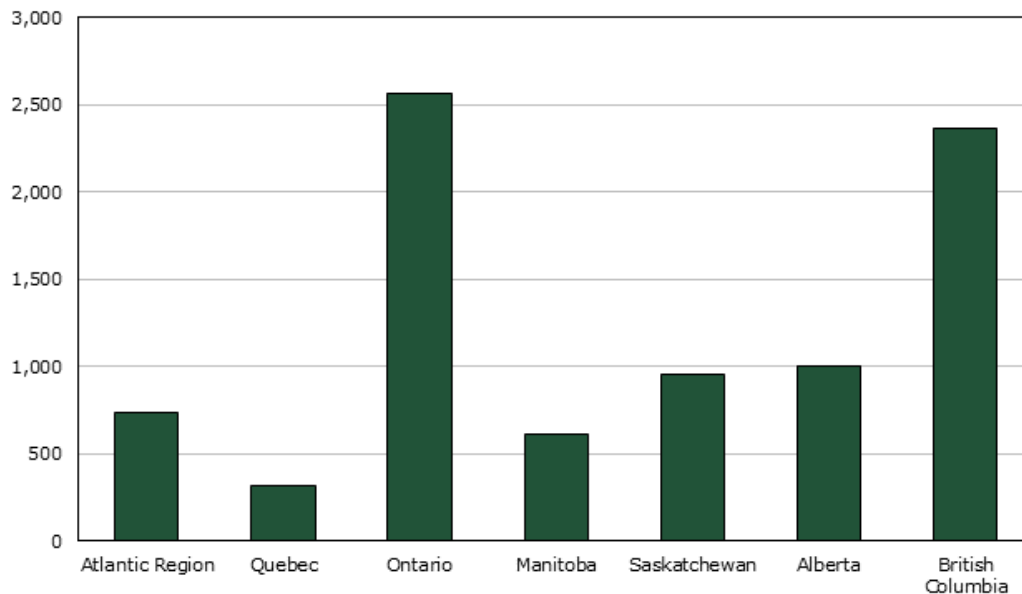
## **Beekeepers make a comeback**

While the number of beekeepers fell sharply in the 1990s, the beekeepers who remained managed to get more honey out of fewer colonies. In 1998, a record 101.6 million pounds of honey was produced, even though Canada had one-quarter fewer colonies than during the peak years of the 1980s.

While honey production has increased since 2000, it remains an unstable business. For example, a new record of 106.6 million pounds of honey were produced in 2006, while 2007 and 2008 totals fell by more than a third.

**Chart 2**  
**Beekeeping in Canada, by region, 2015**

number of  
beekeepers



**Source:** Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 001-0007.

### **It's about more than honey**

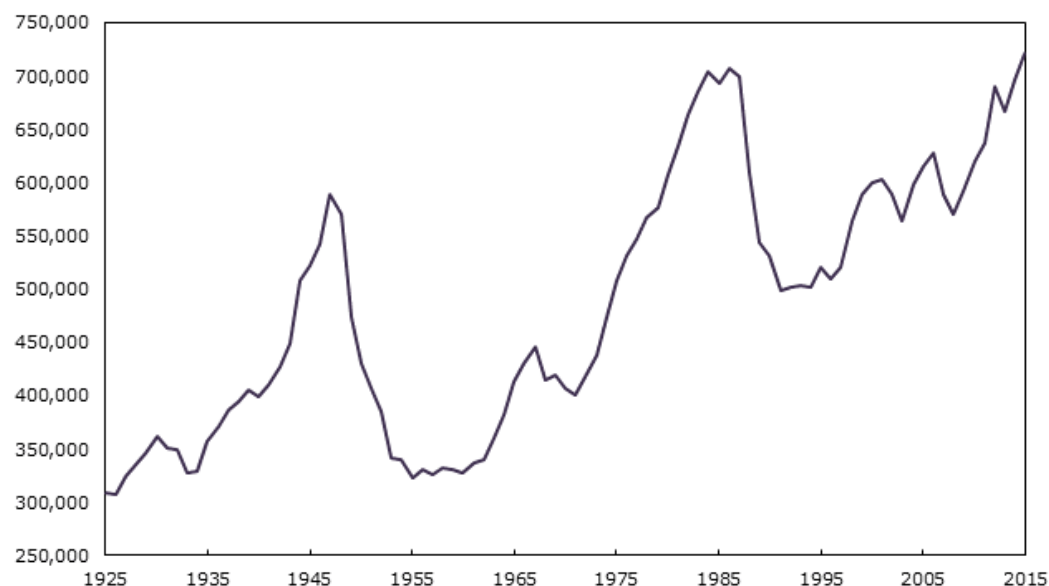
While honey is the most obvious handiwork of a bee, it is not the most important economically. Bees are crucial to the pollination of a host of plants, including fruits, vegetables and crops, such as canola.

Canola was by far the most important bee pollinated crop in 2014, with sales topping \$7.3 billion, followed by soybeans at just over \$2.5 billion. Blueberries placed third with \$265 million in sales in 2014, followed by apples (\$211 million), cranberries (\$114 million) and carrots (\$94 million).

The bee's importance as a pollinator was one reason why Ontario and British Columbia were home to over half (57%) of all beekeepers in Canada in 2015, while their honey production (13 million pounds) was less than one-sixth the size of the three Prairie provinces (78 million pounds).

**Chart 3**  
**Bee colonies in Canada**

number of colonies



**Source:** Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 001-0007.

## Honey today

There has been much concern over the health and future of honey bees in Canada. However, the most recent data show that the value of honey sold by Canadian producers in 2015 rose by 10.9% from a year earlier to a record high of \$232 million. Production was up 11.4% to 95.3 million pounds, while the number of colonies increased 3.6% to a record high 721,106. At the same time, the number of beekeepers fell 4.1% to 8,533 at the national level, with most of the drop occurring in Ontario, down 21.5% to 2,562.

## Definitions

**Beekeeper:** Refers to one person, family or business that engages in beekeeping, especially as a means of livelihood.

**Honey producing colony:** Refers to one hive of honeybees which is kept and managed primarily for the purpose of honey production. The colony may also be used for pollination purposes.

## References

Katz, N. and A. Ragoo. 2013. *Statistical Overview of the Canadian Honey Industry, 2012*. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Melhim, A., A. Weersink, Z. Daly and N. Bennett. 2010. *Beekeeping in Canada: Honey and Pollination Outlook*. University of Guelph.

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