

## European Honey Contest 2024 – Koper, Slovenia: Establishing the Biennial Framework for 2026 and beyond

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Consumers face an increasingly wide choice of honey, accompanied by growing concerns about authenticity. A 2023 European Commission study reported that 46% of imported honey is suspected of adulteration, undermining consumer trust and creating unfair competition for beekeepers producing high-quality honey. To ensure fair market value for premium products, reliable mechanisms for quality assurance and authentication are essential. International honey competitions, such as the European Honey Contest, address this challenge through objective and professional sensory evaluation combined with laboratory analyses to verify quality, safety, and authenticity. This approach provides beekeepers with a credible marketing tool while offering consumers a reliable guarantee of authentic honey. Honey samples were evaluated by a 10-member international panel of honey experts following the Rules of the Board of the Slovenian Beekeepers' Association for the sensory evaluation of honey. Appearance, odour, taste, and aroma in relation to declared botanical origin were scored (maximum 30 points). Honey type categories were defined only when at least seven samples of the same type were submitted; otherwise, honeys were classified as forest (honeydew) or multifloral based on electrical conductivity. All samples that received certificates of participation met strict quality requirements (water content  $\leq 18.6\%$  and hydroxymethylfurfural (HMF)  $\leq 15$  mg/kg), highlighting the importance of these criteria for all participants and providing a solid foundation for future editions. In total, 114 honey samples from 11 European countries were assessed across five categories: black locust, multifloral, forest, linden, and chestnut honey. To highlight the best honeys, gold, silver, and bronze medals were awarded only to the top three samples per category. The 15 award-winning honeys were additionally tested for authenticity and acaricide residues. Only after the high quality and safety standards were proven, the best honey samples were announced. The established methodology, constructive feedback and good attendance were a solid foundation for the next European Honey Contest in 2026.

**Key words:** honey, contest, quality, authenticity, evaluation, sensory properties.