

Beekeepers Census 2019



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Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



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Beekeepers Census 2019

Introduction

The Beekeepers Census 2019 was conducted by the Federation of Irish Beekeepers' Associations (FIBKA) and the Irish Beekeepers Association (IBA) among the 4,462 members of their affiliated associations (as at September 2019). A total of 1,151 census forms were completed by beekeepers, and this data was used to extrapolate to the entire 4,462 membership. The census does not include beekeepers that are not members of an affiliated association, but it is thought these beekeepers have smaller-scale operations and do not contribute significantly to overall honey production in Ireland. The 2019 census is the third census of beekeepers in the Republic of Ireland, with previous censuses conducted in 2011 and 2016.

Bord Bia, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, FIBKA and the IBA wish to thank beekeepers for their co-operation with this census.

Notes:

For convenience, figures in this report are rounded.

Statistical analysis for this census was carried out by Franklin Research, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin.

Executive Summary

There are 4,462 beekeepers in Ireland in September 2019 and 27,040 bee colonies. These figures represent a 41% increase in the number of beekeepers since the previous census in 2016, and a 26% increase in the number of bee colonies. Though there are many commercial beekeepers, the vast majority of beekeepers in Ireland are hobbyists with small apiaries. The median average number of hives per beekeeper is three full hives.

County Cork has the highest number of bee colonies, followed by Dublin, Tipperary, Wexford and Waterford. Together these five counties account for 44% of all bee colonies in Ireland in 2019. Overall, however, beekeeping is well dispersed across the country and is not dominated by any particular area of Ireland.

Total honey production in 2019 is 258 tonnes, representing a 71% increase from the 2016 census. This increase is partly due to the increase in the number of bee colonies but is also due to higher honey output per hive. Average honey output per full hive rose from 8.5 kg in 2016 to 11.4 kg in 2019.

Beekeepers with larger apiaries have higher returns per hive, reflecting the fact that larger apiaries are operating as businesses rather than doing beekeeping as a hobby. Beekeepers with 50 or more full hives achieved an average honey output of 22.4kg per full hive. These beekeepers sell most (60%) of their honey directly to retailers.

The census form included a question on issues that may be limiting the development of beekeeping in Ireland and/or the expansion of their own apiary. Beekeepers were provided with a list of six factors and asked to choose their top-three factors. The two most chosen factors were: *level of support, expertise and funding provided the Department of Agriculture, Teagasc and Local Authorities* (chosen by 64% of beekeepers); and *reduced biodiversity impacting on bees' ability to forage* (chosen by 59% of beekeepers).

For further information contact:

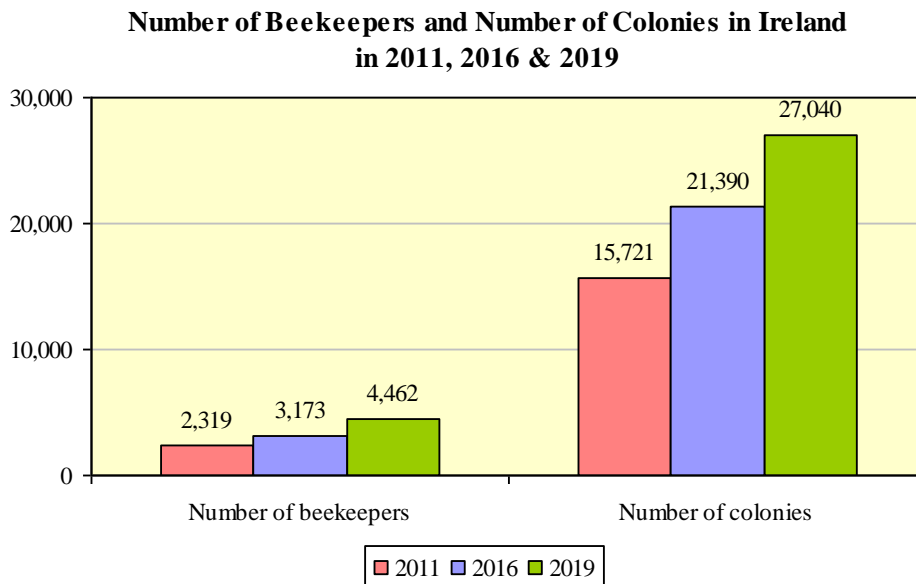
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Section 1: Number of Beekeepers, Number of Colonies & Honey Production

This section provides an overview of beekeeping in Ireland. It includes information on the number of beekeepers, colonies and honey output at national and county level, average honey output per hive and the proportion of beekeepers producing queens and/or nuclei for sale.



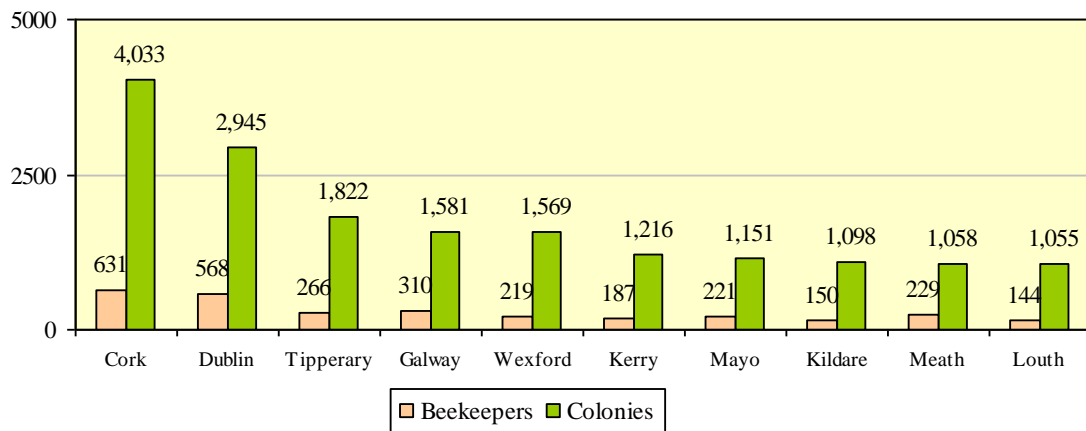
There are 4,462 beekeepers in Ireland in 2019 and 27,040 bee colonies* (full hives and nucleus hives**). Though there are some commercial beekeepers with 100+ hives, the vast majority of beekeepers in Ireland are hobbyists, the median average number of hives per beekeeper being 3 full hives.

In comparison to the 2016 census, the number of beekeepers has increased by 41%, while the number of colonies has increased by 26%.

* viable colonies of bees carried into winter as at September 2019

** nucleus hives are hives that have not reached honey producing stage

**Number of Beekeepers and Colonies in 2019
in Top-10* Beekeeping Counties**

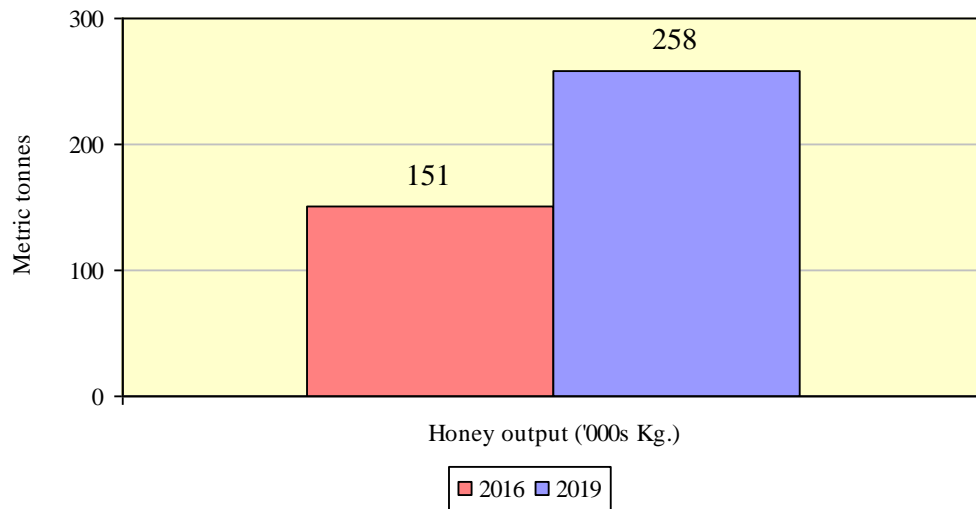


* Based on number of colonies per county.

Total number of beekeepers in 2019 = 4,462; total number of colonies in 2019 = 27,040

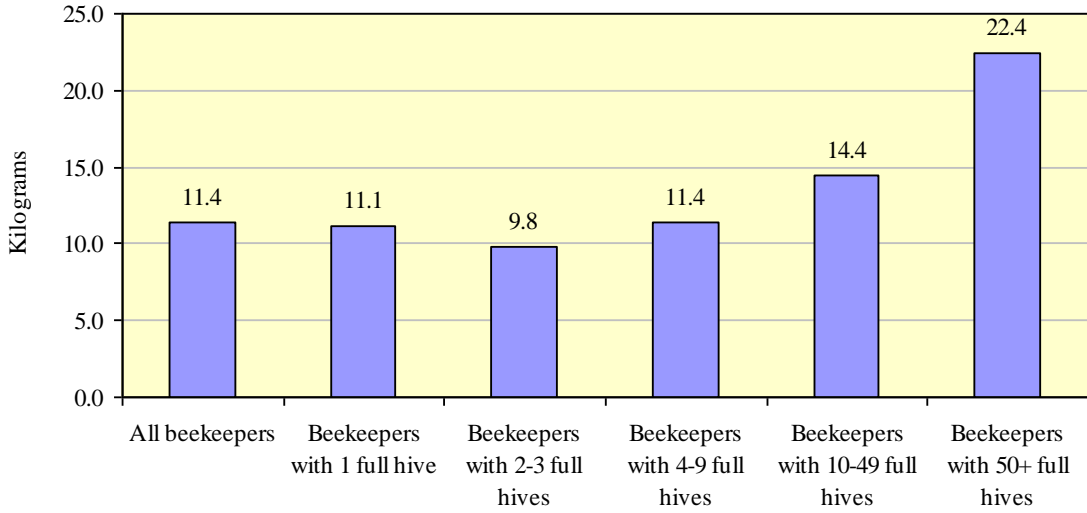
County Cork has the most beekeepers and colonies, with 631 beekeepers and 4,033 colonies (15% of all colonies in Ireland). The counties with the next largest number of colonies are Dublin (with 11% of all colonies in Ireland), Tipperary (7%), Wexford (6%) and Waterford (6%). Together these five counties account for 44% of all bee colonies in Ireland in 2019. Overall, however, beekeeping is well dispersed across the country and is not dominated by any particular area of Ireland.

Honey Output (metric tonnes) in Ireland in 2016 & 2019



Total honey production in 2019 is 258 tonnes (257,621 kilograms), which is a 71% increase from the previous census (151,142 kilograms in 2016). The increase is partly attributable to the increase in total colonies (see first chart) but also reflects higher average honey output per hive than was seen in 2016 (see next page).

Average Honey Output (Kgs.) per Full Hive in 2019

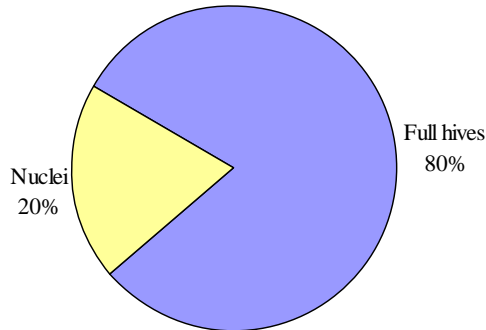


Among all beekeepers in Ireland in 2019, the average honey output per full hive is 11.4 kilograms. This compares to an average honey output per full hive in 2016 of 8.5 kilograms.

Beekeepers with less than 10 full hives have an average honey output in 2019 of approximately 10-11 kg (11.1kg for beekeepers with one hive; 9.8 kg for those with 2-3 hives; and 11.4 kg for those with 4-9 hives). By comparison, average output per hive in 2016 was 6.7 kg for beekeepers with one hive, 8.0 kg for those with 2-3 hives and 8.7 kg for those with 4-9 hives.

Beekeepers with larger apiaries have higher returns per hive, reflecting the fact that larger apiaries are operating as businesses rather than doing beekeeping as a hobby. Apiaries with 10-49 full hives achieved an average output per full hive of 14.4 kg, while those with 50 or more full hives achieved an average output of 22.4 kg. These figures are a strong improvement on 2016 where the reported average output per full hive was 11.4 kg among beekeepers with 10-49 hives, and 9.4 kg among those with 50 or more hives.

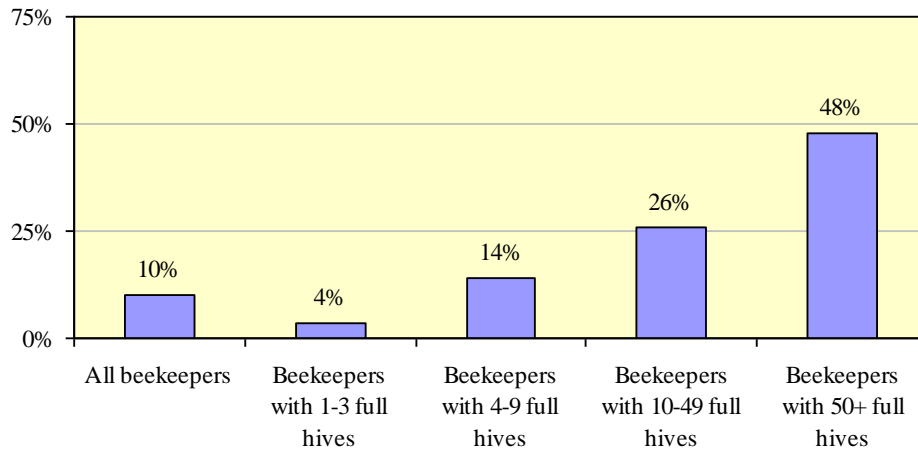
Breakdown of Colonies between Full Hives and Nuclei as at September 2019



Number of colonies in September 2019 = 27,040.

Of the total of 27,040 colonies in Ireland in 2019, 80% are full hives and 20% are nuclei (i.e. hives that have not reached honey producing stage).

Percent of Beekeepers in Ireland Producing Queens and/or Nucleus Hives for Sale/Transfer to Other Beekeepers in 2019

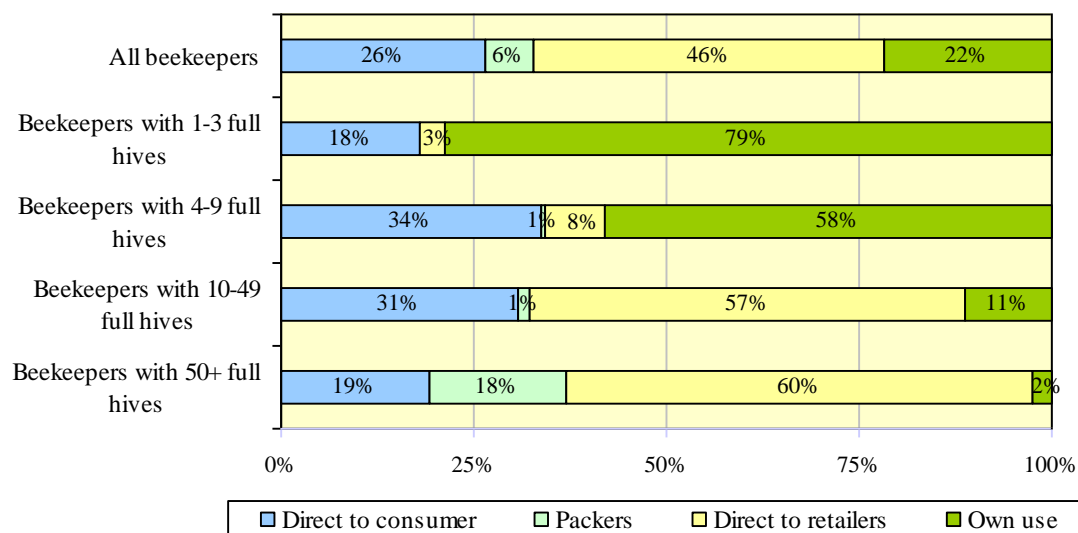


Beekeepers producing queen bees and nuclei for sale are primarily those with a large number of hives. Ten percent (10%) of all beekeepers in Ireland in 2019 produce queens and/or nuclei for sale. Among beekeepers with 50 or more full hives, 48% produce queens and/or nuclei for sale.

Section 2: Sales/utilisation of Honey & Factors Affecting Development of the Beekeeping Sector

This section looks at the sales channels and utilisation of honey, as well as beekeepers' opinions on the factors limiting the development of the beekeeping sector in Ireland and/or the development of their own apiaries.

Sales/Utilisation of Honey by Beekeepers in Ireland in 2019



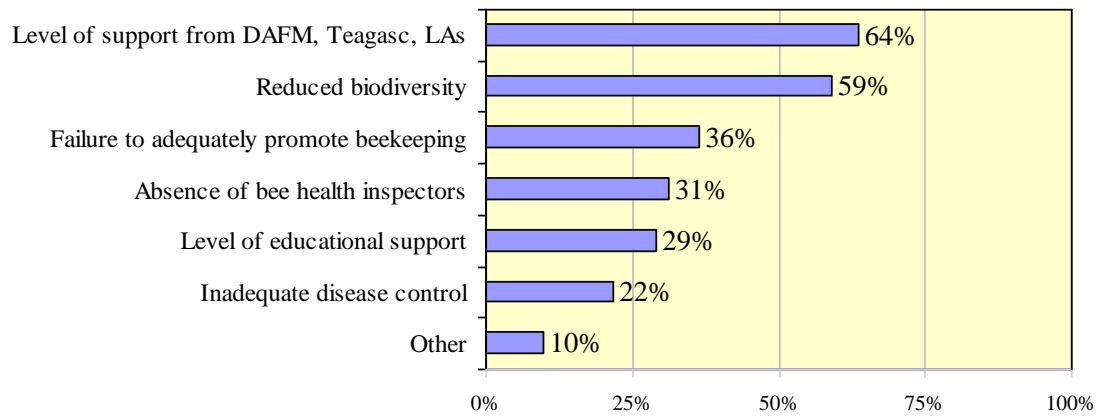
Of the total of 257,621 kilograms of honey produced in Ireland in 2019: 26% is sold direct to consumers; 6% is sold to honey packers; 46% is sold direct to retailers and 22% is for own use (i.e. share with friends/family).

The utilisation of honey output varies between those who do beekeeping as a hobby and those who are commercial beekeepers. Among those with 1-3 hives, most (79%) of their honey output is for their own use. Among those with 50 or more hives, 60% is sold direct to retailers, 19% is sold direct to consumers, 18% is sold to honey packers and 2% is for their own use.

Beekeepers were asked to choose their top-three issues from a list of six factors that might be limiting the development of the Irish beekeeping sector and/or preventing them from increasing their number of hives. The six factors were described as follows:

1. Inadequate disease control / inadequate disease awareness among beekeepers.
2. Level of educational support available to beekeepers (including new / prospective beekeepers).
3. Level of support, expertise and funding provided by Department of Agriculture / Teagasc / Local Authorities.
4. Absence of bee health inspectors to diagnose disease and promote bee health.
5. Reduced biodiversity impacting on bees' ability to forage.
6. Failure to adequately promote beekeeping and to publicise the value of bees as pollinators.
7. Other (please specify):

Irish Beekeepers' Opinions on Factors Limiting the Development of Beekeeping in Ireland in 2019



Percents add to more than 100% as beekeepers were asked to list their top-3 factors..

The two most chosen factors were: the *level of support, expertise and funding provided by the Department of Agriculture, Teagasc and Local Authorities* (chosen by 64% of beekeepers); and *reduced biodiversity impacting on bees' ability to forage* (chosen by 59% of beekeepers).

Among the other factors: 36% chose *failure to adequately promote beekeeping and to publicise the value of bees as pollinators*; 31% chose the *absence of bee health inspectors to diagnose disease and promote bee health*; 29% chose *level of educational support available to beekeepers*; 22% chose *inadequate disease control / inadequate disease awareness among beekeepers*; and 10% chose 'other factors'.

Among beekeepers mentioning other factors, the issues were:

- Use of pesticides/chemicals (mentioned by 2% of beekeepers)
- Lack of space to expand, or finding suitable new locations (2%)
- Lack of time, or age of beekeeper (2%)
- Costs associated with beekeeping (1%)
- Cheap imports being sold as real Irish honey (1%)
- Weather (1%)
- Other issues (2%)

APPENDIX TABLE

Table 1: Numbers of Beekeepers, Number of Bee Colonies and Honey Production in the Republic of Ireland by County in 2011, 2016 & 2019

	2011			2016					2019				
	Number of beekeepers	Number of bee colonies	Honey produced (kg.)	Number of beekeepers	Number of full hives	Number of nuclei hives	Number of bee colonies (full hives + nuclei)	Honey produced (kg.)	Number of beekeepers	Number of full hives	Number of nuclei hives	Number of bee colonies (full hives + nuclei)	Honey produced (kg.)
Carlow	18	322	5,469	26	323	120	443	3,604	35	211	52	263	2,409
Cavan	41	125	1,306	53	201	53	254	1,178	79	329	68	397	4,277
Clare	63	382	3,896	86	686	165	851	5,302	121	669	196	866	9,652
Cork	328	2691	37,029	449	2,869	580	3,449	24,021	631	3318	715	4033	37,667
Donegal	52	178	1,613	71	255	58	313	1,556	100	561	215	775	4,055
Dublin	295	1139	14,052	404	1,681	419	2,100	18,509	568	2441	504	2945	30,992
Galway	161	683	6,693	220	936	186	1,122	4,793	310	1215	366	1581	13,496
Kerry	97	753	9,968	133	653	154	807	5,858	187	996	220	1216	13,623
Kildare	78	470	5,332	107	508	114	621	3,369	150	770	328	1098	6,510
Kilkenny	79	741	9,907	108	704	157	861	8,414	152	630	162	792	7,515
Laois	33	208	2,071	45	324	51	375	2,966	63	259	104	363	2,681
Leitrim	57	178	1,509	78	267	105	372	2,894	110	518	174	692	5,449
Limerick	37	211	1,874	52	235	54	289	2,394	71	629	97	726	9,960
Longford	37	120	985	51	165	44	209	958	71	329	27	356	5,514
Louth	75	449	6,849	103	646	148	794	6,690	144	867	188	1055	14,777
Mayo	115	467	4,779	157	586	164	750	3,962	221	903	248	1151	6,700
Meath	119	491	7,003	163	633	163	796	5,032	229	887	171	1058	9,800
Monaghan	32	116	829	44	160	21	180	1,362	62	320	45	365	3,147
Offaly	55	741	7,883	75	465	171	636	3,651	106	732	185	918	7,031
Roscommon	37	136	1,564	51	226	40	266	1,635	71	296	69	365	3,146
Sligo	28	182	1,440	38	213	67	280	1,913	54	269	81	350	1,864
Tipperary	138	1328	22,680	189	1,484	291	1,775	15,027	266	1443	378	1822	23,659
Waterford	91	1448	25,396	125	1,063	133	1,195	8,753	175	853	115	968	9,957
Westmeath	45	208	2,454	62	213	17	229	1,865	87	350	145	495	3,899
Wexford	114	1366	18,880	156	1,228	261	1,489	9,167	219	1272	297	1569	15,463
Wicklow	94	588	6,554	129	771	163	934	6,266	181	623	196	820	4,380
Total	2,319	15,721	208,012	3,173	17,493	3,897	21,390	151,142	4,462	21,693	5,348	27,040	257,621

2011 figures are based on 1,587 census forms completed by beekeepers and estimates from FIBKA for the remaining 732 beekeepers; 2016 figures are based on 1,366 census forms completed by beekeepers and estimates for the remaining 1,807 beekeepers; 2019 figures are based on 1,151 census forms completed by beekeepers and estimates for the remaining 3,311 beekeepers.

Number of beekeepers per county in 2016 and 2019 was estimated based on the 2011 census, as the 2011 census had the highest response level by beekeepers.

Honey output per county in 2016 and 2019 was estimated by excluding the top 5% of apiaries (by number of colonies) and extrapolating based on the mean average honey output per county.