New Zealand Manuka Honey Producer Pleads Guilty To Adding Chemicals

A New Zealand company pled guilty to charges of adding artificial chemicals to their Manuka honey in order to charge a higher price for it.

New Zealand Food and Safety filed a lawsuit in 2016 against Evergreen Life Ltd after the company recalled 18 of its products. Everything recalled consisted of or contained Manuka honey, and the recall suggested the company had been adding dihydroxyacetone and methylglyoxal to their products.

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DHA and MGO

Both of these substances are crucial to the antimicrobial activity that is so highly prized in Manuka honey. Dihydroxyacetone (DHA) is found in the nectar of Manuka tree flowers, and it converts to methylglyoxal (MGO). The higher the levels of MGO are, the more potent the antimicrobial activity in the honey is. This translates to a more expensive product. While these chemicals naturally occur in Manuka honey, Evergreen Life Ltd has pled guilty to adding artificial DHA (often found in tanning lotions) to their products.

Supply and Demand

Manuka is a highly sought after medicinal product. But is there enough honey to meet the demand? Probably not.

In a 2014 article, the Independent reported that people in the U.K. consumed 1,800 tonnes of Manuka honey. That total is

significantly less than the 10,000 tonnes consumed worldwide, but U.K. consumption was still greater than the reported amount of authentic Manuka honey produced: 1,700 tonnes. That math means that the majority of all Manuka honey sold is not genuine.

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The organization behind those numbers, the Unique Manuka Factor Honey Administration Factor (UMFHA), has since introduced a Unique Manuka Factor (UMF) certification for Manuka honey. The grading system has been called into question, as the UMFHA is a paid membership trade association. There is also the MGO developed by professor Thomas Henle and used primarily by New Zealand based company Manuka Health. The KFactor grading system has been developed by the Wedderspoon company. These are not independent rating systems, and until recently that didn't even matter. The New Zealand Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI) only introduced the science-based definition of Manuka honey in 2018, leaving companies free to choose their own authentication methods prior to that decision.

Regulation and Reality

This is the service that government food and regulatory agencies are designed for. Often, the alternative health world has with stories of the USDA and FDA's incompetence, but those agencies are responsible for food recalls and the reason we have labels on our food in the first place. The biggest problems with these agencies arise when they become bought and paid for, putting corporate profits and big business over the public, or when the agency is unable to keep up with the market. For instance, the U.S. regulating agencies still see no problems with Roundup – despite much evidence to the contrary.

Research is the reality of being a consumer in today's world.

We spend hours looking for the best possible product and hours looking into where it’s from and the history of the manufacturer. Yet today’s world has also gifted us that opportunity. You used to have to take their word for it.

Sources:

- *Premium New Zealand honey producer admits adding chemicals: media* – Reuters
- *New Zealand brings first ‘fake mānuka honey’ prosecution* – The Guardian
- *Evergreen brand mānuka honey products* – New Zealand Food Safety
- *How to Find Real Manuka Honey (80% is fake)* – Healthy Home Economist
- *The Manuka Honey Scandal* – Guardian
- *FAQS* – Wedderspoon
- *Manuka Honey* – Ministry of Primary Industries