

Naturally sweet and healthy

Honey has emerged as the obvious alternative and a natural substitute to sugar. Of late, the category has seen a spurt in the number of brands, which is a testimony to the health benefits that honey has to offer.

By Vimal Anand

In recent years, Indian consumers have become more health conscious and serious about their quality of food. In almost all categories there has been a progressive demand for healthier natural options.

This has seen the emergence of newer and healthier product lines and products, either by fusion or by direct import from the international food market.

For instance, there has been a strong influx of international products like health drinks, cold press juices, baked and gluten-free snacks to food fusion examples like masala oats, honey oats, honey loops and malt-based oat meal bars, all of which depict the change and shift toward healthier products.

Honey, being a natural and healthier supplement to sugar, has been witnessing a steady surge in demand. Being a 100% natural product, derived out of nectar from flowers and made by honey bees, honey has zero fat and zero cholesterol, and is ideally suited for the modern-day hectic lifestyle.



Therefore honey is the obvious alternative and choice substitute to sugar and its benefits have been known to us since ages. A recent consumer preference survey shows consumer purchase pattern across categories driven by factors like purity, health and taste as top priority. The recent spurt in the number of brands in the honey category is a testimony to the health benefits that the product offers.

There are various kind of natural honey found in India. Some of the major varieties of natural honey are mustard honey, eucalyptus honey, mountain honey, acacia honey, wild forest honey, sunflower honey, lychee honey and sidr honey, to name a few. The diverse flora of the country makes it conducive to be a lead producer of natural honey if given the right impetus and care for growth.

Honey is also a rich source of carbohydrates, natural minerals, vitamins and enzymes. It is a perfect natural taste enhancer for food. The right combination of fructose and glucose in honey actually helps the body regulate blood sugar levels in a diabetic patient.

Honey bee farming is also a boon to an agrarian economy like India. Honey bees in their search for nectar also help with the pollination process and in increasing the per hectare field productivity by up to 25%.

Indian honey industry is a key forex earner for the country and provides employment to many a landless farmer (beekeepers). As per reports, India exported 38,177.08 MT of natural honey to the world worth Rs. 706 crore during the fiscal year 2015-16. The industry is growing at around 15% currently.

While the domestic honey market – branded and un-branded – is estimated to be about Rs. 2,000 crore, branded honey contributes about Rs. 700-800 crore.

The market for honey continues to evolve in India. With health consciousness on the rise, we are witnessing a definite spurt in domestic demand on the back of an increase in per capita income, which is driving per capita consumption of honey as well. I wish that our honey consumption increases further and touches the German standard of 2.8 kg per person per annum. Then, instead of exporting honey, we would have to import it to meet our demands. **PG**

The writer is MD, Apis India Limited, a leading honey processor in India and exporter of many honey products.

