

Date of Hearing: April 29, 2021

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

Robert Rivas, Chair

AB 519 (Irwin) – As Amended March 11, 2021

SUBJECT: Honey: labeling requirements

SUMMARY: This bill would expand the country of origin labels (COOL) on imported honey by requiring the COOL to be conspicuous and be of the same size and font as the statement for the United States honey grade.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires any markings that are used or required to be used on any container of honey to identify the container or describe its contents to be plainly and conspicuously marked, stamped, stenciled, printed, labeled, or branded in letters that are large enough to be readily discernible by any person, as specified.
- 2) Requires a container or subcontainer (container) of extracted honey to be conspicuously marked with one of the United States grades, as specified.
- 3) Requires a container of imported honey to be labeled with the name of the territory or foreign country from which it is imported.
- 4) Makes a violation of honey labeling an infraction.
- 5) Requires the Secretary of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) and the county agricultural commissioners (CAC), as specified, to enforce honey-labeling laws.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: Federal and California law regulates honey country of origin labeling for foreign honey sold in the state. Current law requires each bottle to indicate where the honey is sourced from and if the honey is imported or a domestic and imported blend. Although federal statute requires country of origin labeling to be in close proximity and of comparable size of the grade statement, there are no other provisions regarding origin labeling.

California produces over 3.2 million pounds of honey every year, but the market for California grown honey is impacted by imported honey. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, honey imports to the US have increased by two-thirds over the past 30 years, while the exporting of US honey has remained relatively the same. To safeguard consumer protection and enable Californians to buy locally produced honey with confidence, it is important to standardize COOL regulations.

Furthermore, with the jump in imports, there is an increased chance for honey to be adulterated. In a June 2020 article, Sweetwater Science Labs, an independent testing lab in Missouri, stated that roughly 35-40% of consumer-instigated honey testing it conducted over the past 18 months was either adulterated, of false origin, or of poor quality because it had been overly processed, such as being overheated.

According to the author, ambiguity in current law has created discrepancies in honey origin labeling, resulting in obscure and cryptic labels. Although there are provisions requiring that country of origin is placed on honey containers, they do not specify size, location, or format of such label. This means honey packaging is often misleading as country of origin is frequently stamped on the lid or bottom of the bottle, where the physical shape of the container makes it difficult for the average consumer to understand where the honey is sourced.

Supporters state by allowing manufacturers to place the label anywhere on the container and allowing them to decide how it appears, the consumer must search for the information on every container to be able to compare brands and even types under the same brand name. Consumers should have the right to know where their honey is coming from and what they are ingesting. This bill, by requiring honey producers to origin placed in conspicuous locations, will protect consumers from ambiguous or hidden printing COOLs.

The requirements for honey COOLs were last updated in 1978.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**Support**

California State Beekeepers Association (Sponsor)
Ventura; County of

Opposition

None on file

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