Opinion of the SKLM

on

Pyrrolizidin alkaloids
in honeys, bee-keeper products and pollen products.

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The SKLM has been considering the implications of the presence of pyrrolizidin alkaloids (PA) in honeys and the potential problems which may arise from a contamination of honeys, bee-keeper products and pollen products with pyrrolizidin alkaloids. The German version of the opinion was adopted on 8th November 2002, the English version was agreed on 8th May 2003.

The existing data base relating to the contents of PAs in honeys derived from PA-containing plants (e.g. Echium spp. honey or Senecio spp. honey) as well as the data base relating to the exposure of consumers to PAs is presently judged to be inadequate. Similarly, the data base for the toxicology of these PAs and on their human metabolism is still incomplete, so that at present a final risk evaluation cannot be performed.

The entry pathway of PAs into honey has not yet been clearly established. Initial experimental findings point to a correlation between PA content and pollen content of honeys, so that entry via pollen could possibly occur. To confirm this view additional investigations are needed which should also include the nectar. The SKLM recommends to direct particular attention to those products produced by using the pollen of PA-containing plants. These products are marketed as food supplements and are therefore likely to be consumed in larger amounts.

The main goal of future research should be directed toward the careful analytical determination of the PA-contents of honeys and pollens. There is an additional need to investigate, how the choice of the physical location of bee populations and of appropriate procedures for obtaining honey could reduce the PA-contents of honeys to the lowest possible level.