The World Famous Macedonian Honey Bee



Ark of Taste Display at Terra Madre, Turin Italy, 2014



Macedonian Honey

by Stephanie Georgieff

Slow Food International's Terra Madre 2014 took place in Turin, Italy last October. The 10th bi-annual event brought together over 1000 food exhibitors from 130 nations, featuring tastings, food workshops and speakers on topics ranging from craft cocktails to climate change effects on agriculture. The most recent edition of this international gathering of food communi-ties once again created an opportunity to highlight the unique food and agriculture of the Republic of Macedonia. The 2014 theme was "The Ark of Taste docks in Turin," and featured a large exhibit where members from around the world could display their unique artisan heirloom food products.

The Ark of Taste is a signature project of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity. The Ark, as in the Noah's Ark, is the defining focus of Slow Food as a movement. The project connects bioregions, culture, food traditions and sustainability into a living catalogue of the worlds most unique and endangered foods. It is the hope of the Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity that such educational efforts can revitalize disappearing traditions and enliven local economies. Macedonia is a partner nation of the Balkan ESSEDRA project. This pioneering effort of Slow Food in the Balkans has teamed up eight nations to document and promote their unique food traditions and agricultural products. With seed money from Slow Food International and the European Union, academics and food experts from Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, Turkey and Macedonia have for the past two years been dispatched to the rural corners of their respective nations, interviewing farmers, food producers and elders on the unique offerings of the region.

Macedonia's efforts have been quite productive in terms of locating and documenting unique food products throughout the country. The head office of the Macedonian branch of ESSEDRA is through the Slow Food Bitola office. As a result of their efforts, Slow Food in Macedonia was able to apply for and receive Ark of Taste status for numerous products ranging from the Ohrid Cherry to the Wild Kiselici Apple Vinegar. A panel presentation was given at the Biodiversity tent, where Ark products were featured in tastings and each partner nation was invited to present their activities. Macedonian ESSEDRA project coordinator Emilija Nedelkovska provided the update on Ark Nominations, and participants were treated to Macedonian cheeses and fig slatko. This year several animals were added to the Macedonian Ark of Taste product list; the most delightful addition was the Macedonian Native Honey Bee.

Known to Apiarists as *Apis mellifera macedonica* the Macedonian Honey Bee is a unique subspecies that has been recog-nized as it's own breed in the Bee world since 1988. The Macedonian Honey Bees are distinct in many ways. They are well suited to the local climate, and are heartier than imported Bee varieties. The height of the Macedonian Honey Bee production was under the Ottoman occupation, but there has been resurgence in all things honey in the local Macedonian bazaars and municipalities in recent years. There are honey bee associations forming and international recognition of the unique flavor of Macedonian honeys. It is the hope of Slow Food in Macedonia and the Ark of Taste that this new listing will bring heightened attention to this unique resource of Macedonia.

The Macedonian Honey Bee and Macedonian Honey was featured on the large Ark of Taste display at Terra Madre. Slow Food Macedonia had a vendor table featuring Macedonian Honey along with other Ark products. The BBC 4 Radio Food Program interviewed MacBee President Igor Ilkov for the program's yearlong continuous segment featuring Ark of Taste products from around the globe. MacBee is the newly formed Macedonian Beekeep-ers Association whose sole purpose is to protect and promote the native honeybee.

Igor Ilkov, a native of Gevgelija, has been working with bees since his university days through the Agricultural Faculty at the University of Skopje. He was impressed with the cleanliness of bees and started to learn about Apiculture. Ilkov reports that the reason for the focus on the Macedonian Honey Bee is the imported queen bees from other bioregions are harming the local native population. MacBee was founded in 2013 to help educate Macedonians on their traditional honey offerings. With many foreign honeys flooding the local emerg-ing super markets, many Macedonians have lost the taste and familiarity for their national treasure. With public consumer education efforts, tastings and monthly Day of Honey celebrations throughout different municipalities across Macedonia, Ilkov and MacBee hope to increase demand and respect for local honey.

One of the projects of MacBee is to encourage urban and rural private beekeeping through traditional Skeps. According to *The World History of Beekeeping* and *Honey Hunting*, up to 70 % of Macedo-nian honey production was still done in traditional Skeps until the mid 1900's. Historically, Macedonians would cut down tree trunks with beehives inside and carry them back to their farms and gardens for honey production. Skeps, which are woven beehives made from local reeds and trees, were also the predominant hives for cultivating honey. Ilkov has ten Skeps on his own property, which he considers very modest. MacBee is hoping to encourage all Macedonians to have one or two Skeps on their property so as to increase the health and vitality of the Macedonian Honey Bee population.

During my last visit to Macedonia, I had the unique pleasure of being in Prilep during a Honey Festival. Bee Keepers from all over Macedonia set up kiosks, offering tastings, folk remedy advice and a full range of bee products. I pur-chased a honey propolis mixture, and have found it a great remedy for minor sore throats. At every food bazaar I visited, there were usually at least two honey sellers, with golden poly floral and almost chocolate colored chestnut honeys harvested from their local hives. Ilkov prefers honey in the comb,and is working to educate Macedonians on the health benefits of eating honeycomb on a regular basis. Through MacBee, it is hoped independent beekeep-ers throughout Macedonia will be promoted, and all products associated with honey production be widely appreciated. Propolis, bee pollen, beeswax and royal jelly, along with different grades of honey are offered through the Day of Honey celebrations in cities such as Bitola, Prilep, Skopje, Gevgelija and Mavrovo. Meetings of beekeepers are occurring with regularity and experimental colonies are springing up around the country. There are two Macedonian blogs on beekeeping in Macedonia, *Life with Bees*, found at http://melitagoraizivotpokrajpcelite.blogspot.com/ and *Eko Bee* found at http://ekopcela.blogspot.com/.

When asked about his hopes for the future of the Macedonian Honey Bee, Igor Ilkov answers quickly, "I want everyone to know about the delicious Honey that *Apis mellifera macedonica* has to offer, and for every family in Macedonia to have a Skep."

With so much attention and such a well-organized and enthusiastic community, I think this very special bee from Macedonia has a bright future.

For more information please go to http:// www.macbee.org/

For a listing of all the Macedonian Ark of Taste products to http://www.slowfood-foundation.com/ and type in Macedonia on the search section.

For more information on ESSEDRA, go to www.essedra.com



Igot Ilkov President of MacBee the Macedonian Beekeepers Association



Honey Kiosk from Prilep at Honey Day Festival 2013