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beekeepers starting small hives in Hong Kong's forests, whilst both HK Honey and Kadoorie Farm in Tai Po offer beekeeping courses for beginners.

Hong Kong is also fortunate to boast a climate where farmers can harvest honey all year round. During summer, bees feast on the plentiful longan and lychee blossoms, creating enough honey for farmers to harvest for months ahead. Meanwhile, winter offers many honey-making opportunities too – creating a special kind of honey unique to our warmer climate. Janice Leung Hayes, a local

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food writer and original co-founder of the Island East farmers' markets, says that Hong Kong's unique winter honey is “one of my favourites in the whole world – it is elegant, subtle, floral and works perfectly drizzled over fruit and yogurt”.

The difference in flowers radically affects the taste of honey, so Hong Kong's flora provides its own varieties. Steve says that it is almost akin to how “the different types of grape affect the taste of wine.”

Even big organisations have cottoned on to the delicious taste of local honey: the Hyatt Regency Hong Kong in Sha Tin has been using honey harvested from Wing Wo in their signature Apple Pie and Honey Cake, to popular acclaim. Sylvia Wong, their public relations officer, notes that customers can easily “differentiate the flavours and textures of desserts that use honey instead of sugar,” with many commenting that the sweetness of these dishes is “just perfect.”

#### Going local

Other than its unique taste, there are plenty of other benefits to going local with the sweet stuff.

Aside from the advantages of cutting down on your food miles and carbon footprint, Steve points out that the packaging and processing methods necessary for importing and transporting honey can adversely affect the quality of the final product. Sylvia mentions that one of the main reasons behind the Hyatt Regency's decision to use local honey was the lack of “complicated logistics and long processing and distribution time”, resulting in honey that tastes “fresher and more intense.”

Cedric Alexandra, co-founder of local brand Bee's Nest Pure Honey, notes that many mass-produced honeys are industrially heated to stop them from crystallising when bottled – which results in the loss of some natural properties and nutrients. Similarly, some beekeepers will feed their bees sugar to obtain greater quantities of honey and guarantee a year-round supply, and antibiotics to prevent sickness amongst the hive, whilst also adding sodium to the honey to allow longer preservation periods – not exactly ideal in a product often touted as nature's liquid gold.

Working purely with local farmers



means that producers can get more of an insight into the honey-making process. Cedric often spends hours at the hives watching his bee-master, Gordon Yan, work his magic, whilst Steve is now such a self-proclaimed “bee lover” that he even keeps a few of his own at a farm in Kam Sheung. By working with only one beekeeper, Cedric ensures that the process is tightly controlled: Bee’s Nest Pure Honey is 100 per cent “non-heated, non-sugar-fed, and free of sodium and antibiotics”, meaning that the finished product reaches shelves in as

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natural a state as possible. Similarly, buying local allows consumers to “meet the producer and check the product quality,” Cedric says – something you’re just not able to do when purchasing larger international brands.

Janice also points out that the use of local honey has always been valued in Chinese medicine. “It is often believed that honey from the region where one lives can help with issues like pollen sensitivity,” she says, “so local honey has always been popular, or at least had a purpose here.”

Handily, jars of honey aren’t the only useful things that come from the beehives. HK Honey has enjoyed success with its stylish range of beeswax candles, whilst Cedric plans to introduce a range of highly concentrated beauty products with this unique local honey slant.

### A larger movement

This burgeoning interest in home-grown honey also points to another growing movement in Hong Kong – the desire to buy local in general.

“There has definitely been a shift towards wanting to use local produce, especially organic,” notes Janice. “Many parents now feed their

children organic produce exclusively; if it’s local, even better, because it’s fresher and less expensive.”

She also believes that, “On a small scale, I think people are getting interested in reviving the agricultural industry in Hong Kong. For example, we now have Hong Kong-grown rice, after a 50-year hiatus.” The recent popularity of farmers’ markets like Island East’s and the success of local, organic produce delivery companies, including Homegrown Foods and Eat Fresh, also attests to this, whilst restaurants like Grassroots Pantry, Posto Pubblico and Privé Group’s NUR all actively promote the use of local ingredients in their dishes.

Sylvia, too, has noticed that, “Consumers are getting more health-conscious, as well as environmentally conscious. They are requesting products that are original without further processing, sustainable food ingredients or even organic products,” and the use of local honey and its ready availability fits perfectly into this growing awareness.

For Steve, this is a movement that has not come a moment too soon.

IPC Foodlab has always advocated eating locally grown produce, not only working with local farmers to supply their ingredients, but also growing their own in their IPC Centre organic vertical farms. “The food chain is so delicate,” Steve explains. “You must have respect for your food and where it comes from. Big mass-market companies often don’t think about this, as their models are based on efficiency and profit.” Instead, it is up to us, as individuals, to make a difference with our choices – and that little jar of locally produced liquid gold can be a small step in the right direction. 🍯

