

# Combined Inhibitory Effect of Fir (*Abies alba* Mill.) Honeydew Honey and Probiotic Bacteria *Lactiplantibacillus plantarum* on the Growth of *Salmonella enterica* Serotype Typhimurium

---

Mežnarić, Silvestar; Brčić Karačonji, Irena; Crnković, Goranka; Lesar, Andrija; Pavlešić, Tomislav; Vučković, Darinka; Gobin, Ivana

Source / Izvornik: **Antibiotics, 2022, 11**

Journal article, Published version

Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)

<https://doi.org/10.3390/antibiotics11020145>

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:184:778756>

Rights / Prava: [Attribution 4.0 International](#)/[Imenovanje 4.0 međunarodna](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-07-23**

Repository / Repozitorij:

[Repository of the University of Rijeka, Faculty of Health Studies - FHSRI Repository](#)



## Article

# Combined Inhibitory Effect of Fir (*Abies alba* Mill.) Honeydew Honey and Probiotic Bacteria *Lactiplantibacillus plantarum* on the Growth of *Salmonella enterica* Serotype Typhimurium

Silvestar Mežnarić <sup>1</sup>, Irena Brčić Karačonji <sup>2,3</sup>, Goranka Crnković <sup>4</sup>, Andrija Lesar <sup>5</sup>, Tomislav Pavlešić <sup>3</sup>, Darinka Vučković <sup>1</sup> and Ivana Gobin <sup>1,\*</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> Department of Microbiology and Parasitology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Rijeka, Brace Branchetta 20, 51000 Rijeka, Croatia; silvestar.meznarić@gmail.com (S.M.); darinka.vuckovic@medri.uniri.hr (D.V.)
- <sup>2</sup> Analytical Toxicology and Mineral Metabolism Unit, Institute for Medical Research and Occupational Health, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia; ibrcic@imi.hr
- <sup>3</sup> Faculty of Health Studies, University of Rijeka, Viktora Cara Emina 5, 51000 Rijeka, Croatia; tomislav.pavlesic@fzsri.uniri.hr
- <sup>4</sup> Department of Environmental Health, Teaching Institute of Public Health of Primorsko-Goranska County, 51000 Rijeka, Croatia; goranka.crnkovic3@gmail.com
- <sup>5</sup> Bioinstitut d.o.o., R. Steinera 7, 40000 Čakovec, Croatia; lesar@bioinstitut.hr
- \* Correspondence: ivana.gobin@uniri.hr



**Citation:** Mežnarić, S.; Brčić Karačonji, I.; Crnković, G.; Lesar, A.; Pavlešić, T.; Vučković, D.; Gobin, I. Combined Inhibitory Effect of Fir (*Abies alba* Mill.) Honeydew Honey and Probiotic Bacteria *Lactiplantibacillus plantarum* on the Growth of *Salmonella enterica* Serotype Typhimurium. *Antibiotics* **2022**, *11*, 145. <https://doi.org/10.3390/antibiotics11020145>

Academic Editor: Piotr Szewda

Received: 22 December 2021

Accepted: 22 January 2022

Published: 24 January 2022

**Publisher's Note:** MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



**Copyright:** © 2022 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract:** Honey is a natural food consisting mainly of sugars, enzymes, amino acids, organic acids, vitamins, minerals and aromatic substances. In addition to specific organoleptic properties, honey also has other components that contribute to its nutritional and health value. Proteins, vitamins, minerals, organic acids and phenolic compounds, the most variable components of honey, are predominantly responsible for its strong bioactive effect. Honeydew honey is a less known type of honey with outstanding antimicrobial and antioxidant properties that also demonstrates prebiotic effects and can promote the growth of probiotic bacteria. Foodborne illnesses can be prevented by using probiotic strains in combination with prebiotics. The aim of this study was for the first time to determine potential synergistic antimicrobial effect of fir (*Abies alba* Mill.) honeydew honey (HS) and probiotic bacteria *Lactiplantibacillus plantarum* on *Salmonella enterica* serotype Typhimurium, a primary cause of foodborne illnesses. The effect of three different samples of fir honeydew honey on the growth of *L. plantarum* in de Man, Rogosa and Sharpe (MRS) medium and the potential synergistic effect of HSs and *L. plantarum* on the growth of *S. Typhimurium* in the Brain Heart Infusion (BHI) medium were examined. The results indicate that concentrations of 1 and 5% of all three HS samples stimulate the growth and metabolic activity of *L. plantarum*, while a concentration of 10% inhibits the growth of *L. plantarum*. The concentration of 5% of all three HS and *L. plantarum* combined inhibits the growth of *S. Typhimurium* in BHI broth. Fir honeydew honey showed potential prebiotic properties and antimicrobial activity, both of which can synergistically enhance the probiotic efficacy of *L. plantarum* against *S. Typhimurium*. To conclude, the combination of fir honeydew honey and *L. plantarum* represents a successful combination against *S. Typhimurium* and additional experiments are necessary regarding the mechanisms of their combined effect.

**Keywords:** symbiotic; *Lactiplantibacillus*; honeydew honey; *Salmonella*

## 1. Introduction

Honey is an animal and plant-based product traditionally used for its healing and antimicrobial properties. Its health properties are dependent on the geographic origin and type of honey (botanical origin). One of the highest quality honeys, although it is still a relatively unknown type of honey, is honeydew honey—honey that honeybees (*Apis mellifera*) produce from honeydew secreted by aphids and some scale insects as they

feed on plant sap. A higher content of proteins, minerals and phenolic compounds in honeydew honeys compared to nectar honeys significantly contributes to their remarkable biological activities including strong antimicrobial action [1].

Studies on the antibacterial activity of honeydew honeys reported superior antibacterial efficacy compared to nectar honeys, even stronger than manuka honey [2–5]. The antibacterial activity of honeydew honeys could be largely attributed to hydrogen peroxide formation [2–4]. However, results of recent research indicated that although hydrogen peroxide plays an important role in the inhibition of bacterial growth, phenolics and their interaction with hydrogen peroxide might be the key factors for the antibacterial activity of honeydew honeys [6].

Several studies demonstrated the prebiotic effect of honey on probiotic bacteria, which as part of the body's natural microbiota plays an important role in maintaining health and preventing diseases by various pathogenic microorganisms in the gut [7,8]. In recent times, there has been a renewal of interest in the use of probiotics as biotherapeutic agents as scientific evidence continue to accumulate on the properties, functionality and beneficial effects of probiotic bacteria on humans. The investigation of a new probiotics is driven by the growing demand for probiotic functional food and beverages as well as dietary supplements due to growing consumer awareness regarding the concept of preventive health care. [9,10].

Various probiotic strains have been identified over the years and the most known probiotic bacteria is *Lactiplantibacillus plantarum* (former *Lactobacillus plantarum*). This probiotic strain stimulates the digestive system and fights off disease-causing bacteria by maintaining the intestinal barrier and probiotic-mediated immunomodulation [11]. Probiotic supplements are used to treat or prevent specific health problems, such as seasonal allergies and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) [12]. The action mechanism of probiotics is not yet fully clarified; however, it is expressed by three main mechanisms: Inhibition of the growth of undesirable microorganisms in the intestinal tract by producing antibacterial substances and bacteriocins and competition for nutrients and bonding site; modification of bacterial metabolism and stimulation of the immune system.

Additionally, previous in vitro studies suggested that honey, due to its chemical composition, could play a prebiotic role and favor the growth of lactobacilli and bifidobacteria [7,13–15].

On the other side, there are various strains of pathogenic bacteria that colonize the human digestive system. A well-known strain is *Salmonella enterica* serotype Typhimurium (*S. Typhimurium*). It is a non-typhoid serotype of *S. enterica* which is the primary cause of foodborne illnesses. *S. Typhimurium* causes acute inflammatory diarrhea that can progress to invasive systemic disease in susceptible patients leading to hospitalizations and deaths [16,17]. These diseases can be prevented by using probiotic strains in combination with prebiotics.

Lack of data on the prebiotic potential of honeydew honey motivated us to test the antimicrobial and prebiotic activity of fir (*Abies alba* Mill.) honeydew honey and to determine whether there is a synergistic antimicrobial effect of this honey and probiotic bacteria *L. plantarum* on *S. Typhimurium*.

## 2. Results

### 2.1. Honey Sample Analyses

Results of honey sample analyses are shown in Table 1. Microscopic analysis for morphometry of pollen grains confirmed that all the tested honey samples belonged to fir honeydew honey [18]. Their water content was within the limits according to the Codex Alimentarius and to the EU Draft 96/0114 (CNS) ( $\leq 21\%$ ) [19]. The ash content of HSs was in the range from 0.59 to 0.62%, the electrical conductivity values ranged from 1.17 to 1.22 mS/cm (Table 1), which is in accordance with legislation [19]. All three HSs had the same content of glucose (23.15 g/100 g to 24.08 g/100 g) and fructose (31.255 g/100 g

to 32.27 g/100 g). We did not detect sucrose in any of the tested samples. There was no significant difference in total phenol content (225–231 mgGAE/100 g)

**Table 1.** Characterization of fir (*Abies alba* Mill.) honeydew samples (HSs).

Samples	El. Conductivity/ (mS/cm)	w(Water)/ %	w(Ash)/ %	Glucose/ g/100g	Fructose/ g/100g	Sucrose/ g/100g	Total Phenols/ mgGAE/100g
HS 1	1.22	19.1	0.62	23.15	31.25	-	231
HS 2	1.17	18.4	0.59	24.08	32.27	-	228
HS 3	1.22	17.7	0.62	23.45	32.15	-	225

## 2.2. Antibacterial Effect of Fir Honeydew Honey Samples

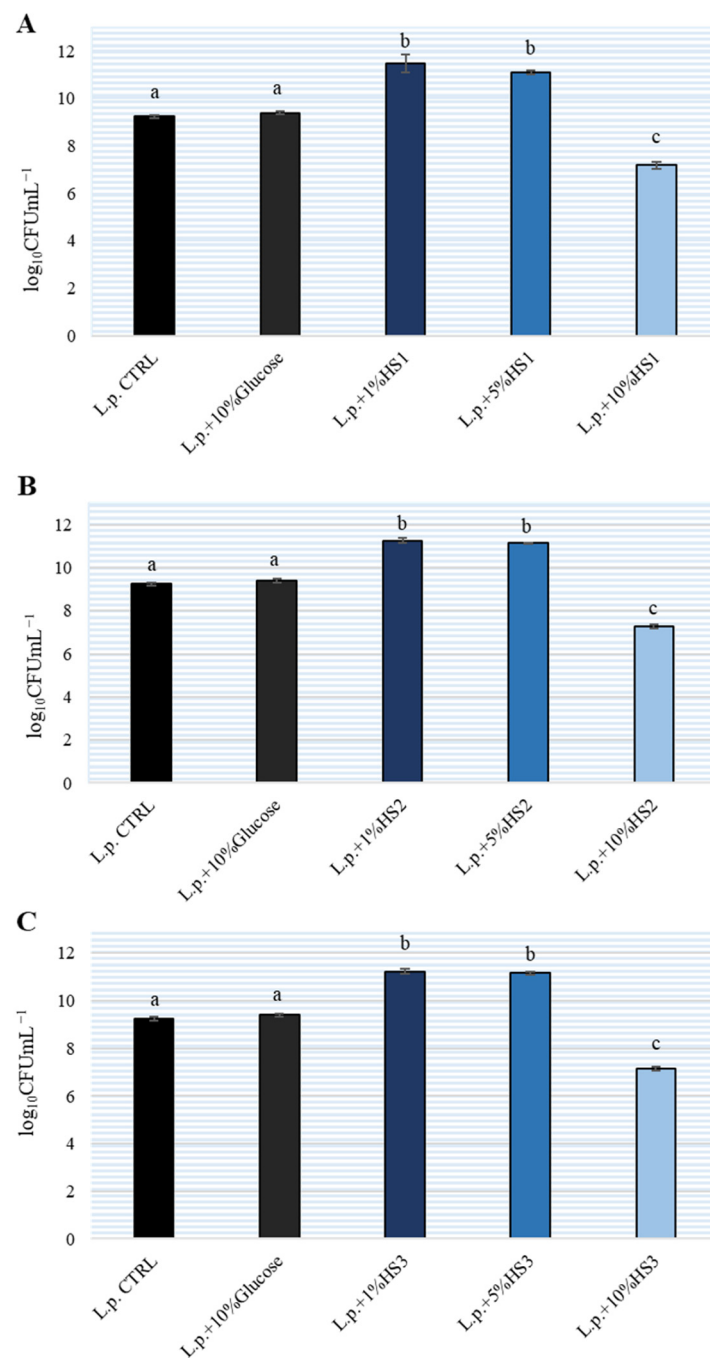
Minimum inhibitory concentrations (MIC) and minimum bactericidal concentrations (MBC) against *S. Typhimurium* were 125–150 mg/mL and HS 1 showed a slightly weaker effect compared to the other two samples. The MIC concentrations against *L. plantarum* were 400 mg/mL and no bactericidal effect was detected (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Minimum inhibitory concentration (MIC) and minimum bactericidal concentration (MBC) of fir honeydew honey (*Abies alba* Mill.; HS 1–3) against *Salmonella enterica* serotype Typhimurium and *Lactiplantibacillus plantarum*.

Bacteria	<i>S. Typhimurium</i>		<i>L. plantarum</i>	
	MIC (mg/mL)	MBC (mg/mL)	MIC (mg/mL)	MBC (mg/mL)
HS 1	150 ± 50	175 ± 43.3	400 ± 0.0	>400
HS 2	125 ± 43.3	125 ± 43.3	400 ± 0.0	>400
HS 3	125 ± 43.3	125 ± 43.3	400 ± 0.0	>400
Meropenem	0.06 ± 0.0	0.06 ± 0.0	ND	ND
Gentamicin	ND	ND	0.004 ± 0.0	0.004 ± 0.0

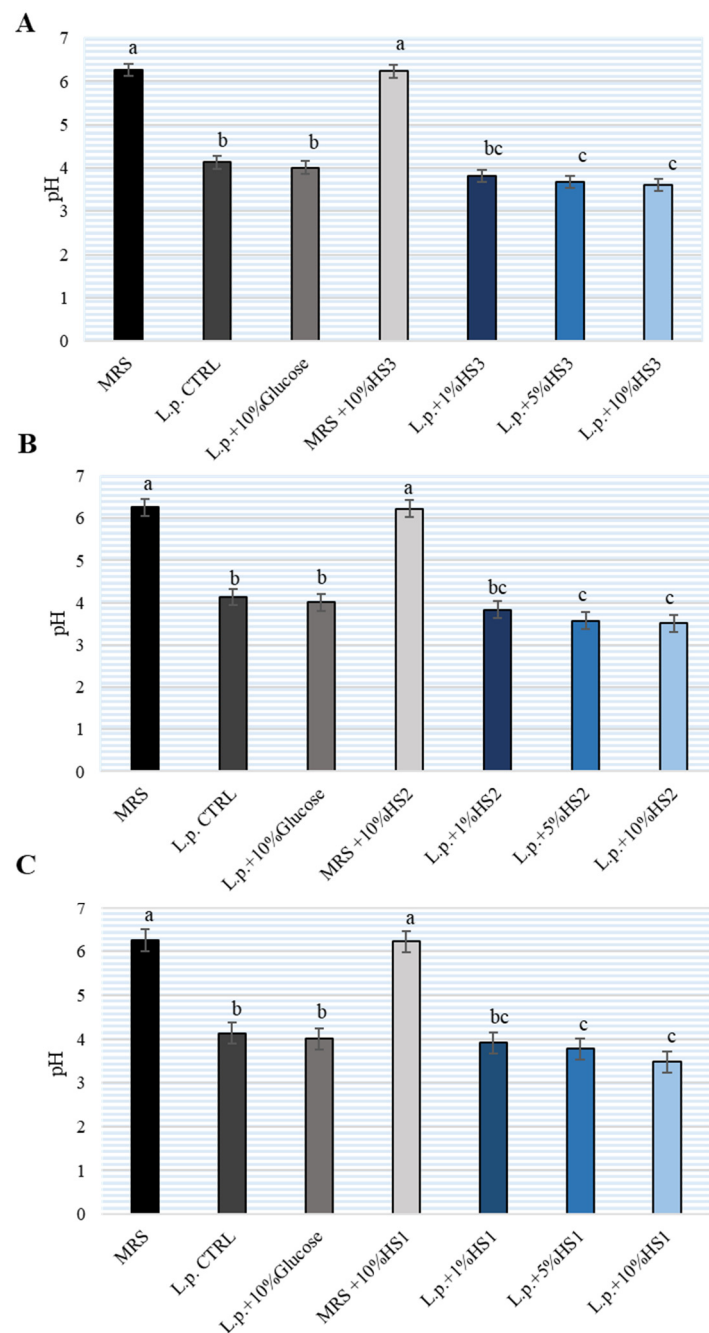
## 2.3. Effect of Honeydew Samples on the Growth of *Lactiplantibacillus plantarum* in de Man, Rogosa and Sharpe Broth

In the experiment, the growth of *L. plantarum* in de Man, Rogosa and Sharpe (MRS) broth with three HS at concentrations of 1%, 5% and 10% was monitored after 24 h incubation. As the control, growth of bacteria in MRS broth without honeydew honey and in MRS broth with 10% glucose was determined. The results are shown on Figure 1. A comparison with the control sample (without HS) showed that *L. plantarum* grew better with the addition of 1% and 5% HS. All three HS stimulated the growth of *L. plantarum* equally well and there was no significant difference between them. In contrast, the addition of 10% HS to MRS broth resulted in an inhibition of *L. plantarum* growth by 2 logarithmic units relative to the control. Therefore, we can conclude that lower concentrations of HS will stimulate the growth of *L. plantarum* while higher concentrations (above 10%) inhibit the growth of lactobacilli. At the same time, the addition of 10% glucose to MRS broth did not affect the growth of lactobacilli in MRS broth. The addition of 5% HS to MRS broth did not result in bacterial growth after 24 h incubation and additional cultivation on Mueller Hinton (MH) agar and MRS agar indicating that no other bacteria were present in the HSs as contamination.



**Figure 1.** Growth of *Lactiplantibacillus plantarum* (L.p.) in de Man, Rogosa and Sharpe (MRS) broth with different honeydew honey samples (HS) (A–C) at different concentrations. The experiment was repeated three times in duplicate and the mean  $\pm$  SD is shown. Different letters denote significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) determined by nonparametric Wilcoxon rank-sum test.

To monitor the metabolic activity of *L. plantarum* after 24 h of incubation, the pH of MRS broth was determined (Figure 2). Bacterial-free MRS broth and MRS broth with 10% HSs had a pH of  $6.2 \pm 3$ . After 24 h of incubation of *L. plantarum* without HS, the pH was lowered (around pH4,  $5 \pm 2$ ). Incubation with different concentrations of HS led to a significant decrease (pH3,  $6 \pm 2$ ) in pH relative to *L. plantarum* growth without HS. No differences were observed between the three HSs samples examined. The addition of glucose to the MRS broth did not affect the further lowering of the pH. Therefore, unlike glucose supplementation, HS supplementation enhanced the metabolic activity of lactobacilli in MRS broth.

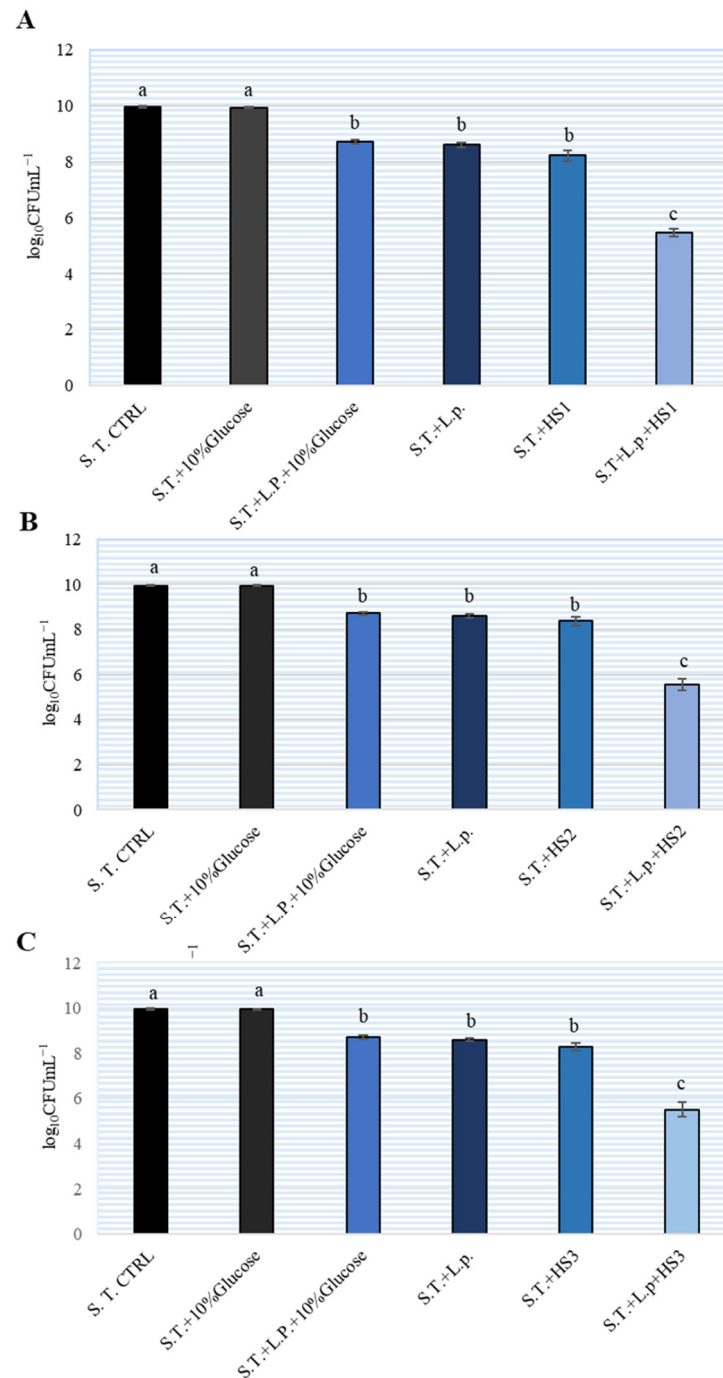


**Figure 2.** pH value of de Man, Rogosa and Sharpe (MRS) broth after cultivation of *Lactiplantibacillus plantarum* (L.p.) with the addition of different concentrations of different honeydew honey samples (HS) (A–C). The experiment was repeated two times and the mean value  $\pm$  SD were shown. Different letters denote significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) determined by nonparametric Wilcoxon rank-sum test.

#### 2.4. Combined Effect of Honeydew Samples and *L. plantarum* on *S. Typhimurium* Growth in MH Broth

To investigate the potential combined effect of HSs and lactobacilli on *S. Typhimurium* growth, MH broth and subinhibitory concentration of 5% of HS were used. The results are shown on Figure 3. The ratio of *L. plantarum* and *S. Typhimurium* was 100:1. After 24 h, we determined more than  $10^{10}$  CFU/mL *S. Typhimurium* in MH broth (control). The addition of *L. plantarum* inhibited the increase in *Salmonella* by approximately 2 logarithmic units, while the addition of 5% HSs inhibited the increase by slightly more than two logarithms. The combination of *L. plantarum* and 5% HS inhibited the growth of *S. Typhimurium* by 5 logarithmic units. There was no statistically significant difference between the tested HSs

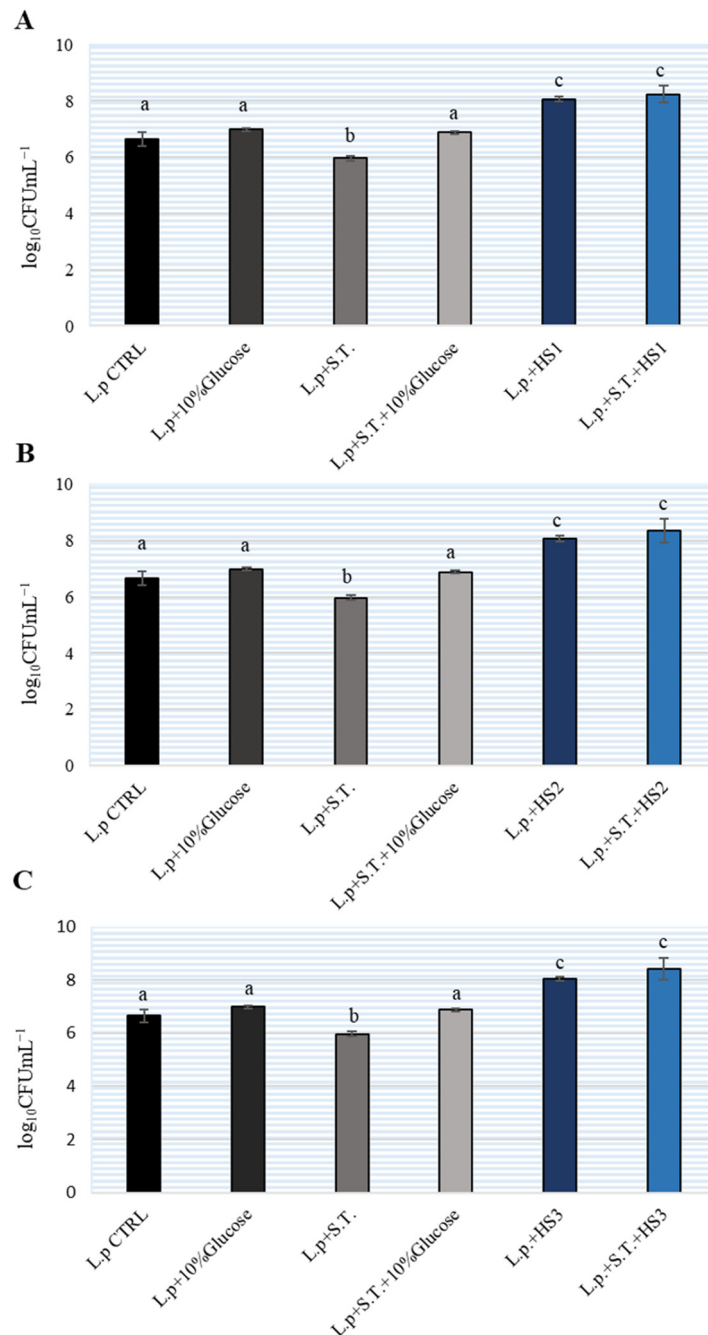
regarding inhibition of *Salmonella* growth. The addition of glucose to the HM broth did not affect the growth of *S. Typhimurium*. The combination of 10% glucose and *L. plantarum* did not show a combined effect on the growth of *S. Typhimurium*.



**Figure 3.** Combined inhibitory effect of different honeydew samples (HS) (A–C) and *Lactiplantibacillus plantarum* (L.p.) on the number of *Salmonella enterica* serotype Typhimurium (S.T.) in Brain Heart Infusion (BHI) broth. The experiment was repeated two times and the mean values  $\pm$  SD were shown. Different letters denote significant differences between groups ( $p < 0.05$ ) determined by nonparametric Wilcoxon rank-sum test.

At the same time, the number of lactobacilli was determined in the tested samples. The results are shown on Figure 4. In MH broth and MH broth with the addition of 10% sucrose, we determined an increase of 0.5 logarithm so *L. plantarum* would not multiply successfully in MH broth. The addition of HSs significantly affected the ability of *L. plantarum* to

multiply and the number of bacteria increased by 2 logarithmic units. In the sample which, in addition to lactobacilli, contained *S. Typhimurium* and HSs, the same increase by 2 logarithmic units was determined. Therefore, the addition of honey to MH broth positively affected the growth of *L. plantarum*.



**Figure 4.** The number of *Lactiplantibacillus plantarum* (L.p.) during co-cultivation in Brain Heart Infusion (BHI) broth with different honeydew samples (HS) (A–C) and *Salmonella enterica* serotype Typhimurium (S.T.). The experiment was repeated two times and the mean values  $\pm$  SD were shown. Different letters denote significant differences between groups ( $p < 0.05$ ) determined by nonparametric Wilcoxon rank-sum test.

### 3. Discussion

Honeydew honey is a type of honey produced from honeysuckle; a sweet substance secreted by aphids after processing plant juice. In addition to its attractive sensorial characteristics (dark brownish color and sweet flavor with pleasant, slightly resinous



aftertaste and aroma), honeydew honey is valued due to its pronounced antibacterial potential. In our previous study with samples of fir (*Abies alba* Mill.) honeydew honey collected from Gorski kotar (Croatia), we proved an antibacterial effect against resistant strains of *Acinetobacter baumannii* and methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and the bactericidal effect was concentration dependent [20]. Majtan et al. have proven the bactericidal effect of Slovak honeydew honey from the floral source of *Abies* spp. against multidrug-resistant *Stenotrophomonas maltophilia* [21]. Pérez Martin et al. showed that Spanish honeydew honey from different floral origins had the capacity to inhibit Gram-positive bacteria *Micrococcus luteus* and *Staphylococcus aureus* [22]. The antimicrobial activity of Turkish honeydew honey was tested on 12 bacteria and two yeasts. The honey samples showed the highest antimicrobial activity against *Escherichia coli* O157:H7, *S. aureus* and *Listeria monocytogenes* [23].

In addition to the antimicrobial effect, honeydew honey has a pronounced and antioxidant effect mostly due to biologically active compounds like phenolics. Most phenolic compounds proven in honey such as, chrysin, quercetin, pinocembrin, caffeic acid and apigenin possess potential biological activity [24–26]. Total phenol content in our samples is consistent with the results of previous research [26,27]. Generally, larger amounts of phenolic compounds in honeydew honeys than in flower honeys have been reported in the literature [1]. Besides phenolics, which are mainly flavonoids in honeydew honeys, catalase, peroxidase, carotenoids and non-peroxide components are also responsible for its antioxidant characteristics [28].

Furthermore, due to the oligosaccharide content, honey is also recognized as a potential prebiotic. It has been proven that honey oligosaccharides can promote the growth of lactobacilli and bifidobacteria [29,30]. A comparative study involving honey oligosaccharides has demonstrated a definite prebiotic potential, which however was not as prominent as fructooligosaccharide (FOS) [31]. One of the possible superiorities of honeydew honey as a prebiotic over nectar honey may be due to the significantly higher average content of oligosaccharide melezitose. However, honeydew honey is still one of the rarer and relatively unknown types of honey, and research on its functional potential should be further explored [32–34].

Potentially probiotic microorganisms are extensively studied and are used in a wide range of applications such as prevention of food poisoning, treatment of certain gastrointestinal disorders, food preservation, etc. [35,36]. Lactic acid bacteria, predominantly lactobacilli, are the most frequently mentioned potentially probiotic bacteria. These bacteria have been shown to interfere with pathogenic bacteria by different mechanisms, like lowering the pH and production of antimicrobial compounds such as lactic acid, hydrogen peroxide and bacteriocin-like substances [37]. Lactic acid bacteria can inhibit the adhesion of pathogenic bacteria on intestinal epithelial cells, and consequently reduce pathogen colonization and prevent infection [38,39].

In our previous research, we isolated the *L. plantarum* strain B from homemade sheep's cheese [39]. This strain showed metabolic activity and lowered the pH of the BHI medium with the addition of bile salts. Furthermore, during cocultivation with *S. Typhimurium*, *L. plantarum* strain B significantly inhibited *Salmonella* growth and it was shown that the mechanism of action was probably related to the lowering of pH of the media. Other authors also point out that one of the main mechanisms of action of probiotic microorganisms is lowering the pH, which is especially important in the case of *S. Typhimurium*, which is extremely sensitive to low pH [40,41]. Kajiwara et al. showed effects of honey on lactic and acetic acid production by intestinal *Bifidobacterium* spp. in a manner like those of FOS, galactooligosaccharide and inulin [42]. All of the honey types (wild and commercial, 5%) supported the growth and acid production in skim milk [43].

Additionally, the tested *L. plantarum* strain showed good adhesion properties on human enterocyte cell line Caco-2 and inhibited the adhesion of *S. Typhimurium* during cocultivation or after pretreatment. Another important property of probiotic bacteria is the ability to aggregate, and the *L. plantarum* strain B showed high auto-aggregation

properties ( $\geq 80\%$ ) and coaggregated with *S. Typhimurium* ( $\geq 30\%$ ) [44]. Therefore, in addition to lowering the pH and aggregation property, this bacterium appears to use other mechanisms that need to be further studied. Since both honeydew honey and the tested *L. plantarum* strain showed good antibacterial properties, we wanted to examine their potential combined or synergistic effect. Table 2 indicates that it has showed an antibacterial effect on both tested bacteria, with the MIC being several times lower for *S. Typhimurium* (about 125 mg/mL). To test whether the HS tested had a potential prebiotic effect on *L. plantarum* strain B, different concentrations were tested (Figure 1) and the application of 1% and 5% HS stimulated the growth of *L. plantarum*. The addition of 10% glucose did not have any effect on the growth of *L. plantarum*. To claim that HSs possess a prebiotic effect the effect of the combination of glucose and fructose should be examined. In addition to glucose, the effect of sucrose was also examined and had no effect on lactobacilli growth (data not shown). From this we can speculate that simple carbohydrates are not the only ones responsible for stimulating the growth of *L. plantarum*. The favorable effect of honey on the growth of lactobacilli has been previously reported by several authors (Mohan et al., Shamala et al., Jiang et al.) [7,15,45]. It seems that phenolics and oligosaccharides have a synergistic effect on human intestinal microbes, which was also speculated by Jiang et al. who determined the positive impact of these compounds from buckwheat honey on the growth of *Bifidobacteria* [45]. Further research is needed to examine the effect of oligosaccharides present in this fir honeydew honey on the growth stimulation of *L. plantarum*.

To investigate the potentially combined inhibitory effect of HS and *L. plantarum* on *S. Typhimurium*, bacteria were grown in BHI broth. To study the combined effect, we chose a 5% solution of HS and the ratio of *S. Typhimurium* and *L. plantarum* was 1:100. In previous tests, we determined that this ratio of bacteria showed the best inhibition (data not shown). From the results we can see that a single application of HSs or *L. plantarum* equally inhibited the growth of *S. Typhimurium*, while their combination proved to be the most effective. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first report of a combined antimicrobial effect of honeydew honey and probiotic bacteria *L. plantarum* on *S. Typhimurium*.

In the same experiment, we monitored the number of lactobacilli that multiply very slowly in this medium. The addition of HSs resulted in an increase in the number of lactobacilli by 2 logarithmic units and a decrease in the pH of the sample (around pH5,  $3 \pm 2$ ). From the above, we could conclude that the reason for the decrease in *S. Typhimurium* in the samples lies in the fact that lactobacilli are metabolically active and that their number in the samples increased, which increased the chance of coaggregation. In this way the bacteria are in close contact and better exhibit their antimicrobial effect. Interestingly, the addition of 10% glucose did not show the same effect and did not lead to a significant increase in the number of lactobacilli in the samples, nor did it inhibit the increase in *Salmonella*. Therefore, we can say that other active components that manifest their effect are obviously present in honeydew samples.

## 4. Materials and Methods

### 4.1. The Honeydew Honey Samples

The fir (*Abies alba* Mill.) honeydew samples (HS) were purchased from Gorski d.o.o., Fužine, Croatia. They were obtained during summer 2015 from the mountain region Gorski kotar (western part of Croatia) defined by Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) system coordinates as follows: Sample 1 (HS 1), location 1: Lič; Potkoš ( $45^{\circ}17'59''$  N,  $14^{\circ}44'12''$  W), sample 2 (HS 2), location 2: Crni lug; Lazac ( $45^{\circ}22'02''$  N,  $14^{\circ}43'10''$  W) and sample 3 (HS 3), location 3: Fužine; Vrelo ( $45^{\circ}19'34''$  N,  $14^{\circ}42'16''$  W). HS were stored at  $4^{\circ}\text{C}$  in hermetically closed glass jars until analysis. For microbiological analyses, HS samples were diluted in MRS or BHI broth and pasteurized at  $70^{\circ}\text{C}$  for 15 min [46].

#### 4.2. The Honeydew Honey Analyses

The melissopalynological analysis followed the methods recommended by the International Commission for Bee Botany (now known as International Commission on Plant Pollinator Relations; ICPPR) [47]. Microscopic analysis for morphometry of pollen grains and honeydew elements such as hyphae, fungal spores, mycelium or unicellular algae was performed on a Hund H500 (Helmut Hund GmbH, Wetzlar, Germany) light microscope with attached digital camera (model Dino-Eye AM423U; Dino-Lite, AnMo Electronics Corp., Hsinchu, Taiwan) and coupled to an analysis system (DinoCapture 2.0 v. 1.4.9; Dino-Lite). Water content was determined by refractometry, measuring the refractive index, using standard model Abeé refractometer (Carl Zeiss, Jena, Germany) at 20 °C. Water content (%) was obtained from the Chataway table [48]. Electrical conductivity was measured in a solution of 20 g honey sample in low-conductivity water system at 20 °C using a conductometer (HI-8733; Hanna Instruments, Woonsocket, RI, USA), while the ash content was calculated according to the results of electrical conductivity [13]. To determine concentrations of sugars (glucose, fructose, sucrose) in HS, high performance liquid chromatography combined with RI detector (HPLC-RID) (Knauer, Berlin, Germany) was used [48].

The Folin–Ciocalteu method was used to determine the concentration of total phenols [49]. Gallic acid (Sigma Aldrich, Darmstadt, Germany) was used as a standard to produce the calibration curve.

Each HS (1 g) was diluted in 10 mL distilled water and filtered through Whatman No. 1 paper. This solution (0.5 mL) was then mixed with 2.5 mL of 0.2 N Folin–Ciocalteu reagent (Sigma Aldrich, Darmstadt, Germany) for 5 min and 2 mL of 75 g/L sodium carbonate ( $\text{Na}_2\text{CO}_3$ ) (Sigma Aldrich, Darmstadt, Germany) was then added. After incubation at room temperature for 2 h, the absorbance of the reaction mixture was measured at 760 nm against a methanol blank (Eppendorf Biofotometar, Hamburg, Germany). The mean of three readings was used and the total phenolic content was expressed in mg of gallic acid equivalents (GAE)/100 g of honey.

#### 4.3. Bacterial Strains and Growth Conditions

*L. plantarum* isolates strain B from homemade sheep's cheese were kindly provided by Prof. Jadranka Frece from the Faculty of Food Technology and Biotechnology, University of Zagreb, Croatia [44,50]. *S. enterica* serotype Typhimurium ATCC 14,028 were obtained from the culture collection of the Department of Microbiology and Parasitology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Rijeka. All of the tested bacteria were kept in 30% glycerol broth at  $-80$  °C. *L. plantarum* was grown in MRS broth (Biolife Italiana, Milan, Italy) in microaerophilic atmosphere (5%  $\text{CO}_2$ ) for 48 h at 37 °C. *S. Typhimurium* was cultivated in nutrient broth (Biolife Italiana, Milan, Italy) and the number of bacteria was determined by plate counting on Salmonella Shigella (SS) agar (Biolife Italiana, Milan, Italy) or Mueller Hinton agar (MHA) (Biolife Italiana, Milan, Italy). The number of bacteria in the suspension was determined photometrically at  $\lambda = 600$  nm and the absorbance (A) was set to 0.3, corresponding to a concentration of  $10^8$  CFU/mL.

#### 4.4. Antibacterial Activity Assay

MIC and MBC of the HSs were determined using a standard microdilution technique in Muller Hinton Broth (MHB). Each honey sample was dissolved in MHB to prepare stock solutions of 0.8 g/mL. Furthermore, twofold serial dilutions in MHB were prepared from stock solutions of each honey sample to give final concentrations ranging from 0.0125 to 0.4 g/mL. A volume of 100  $\mu\text{L}$  of each diluted sample was mixed with equal volume of bacterial suspension. Positive (broth and inoculum) and negative (simple broth) growth controls were prepared. The plates were incubated for 24 h at 37 °C and 120 rpm (Unimax 1010; Heidolph Instruments GmbH&CO., KG, Schwabach, Germany). MIC values were taken as the lowest concentration of honey sample that produced no visible bacterial growth compared to the control wells after 24 h of incubation at 37 °C. MBC is determined by

inoculating the samples used for MIC determinations onto MHA and incubating further for 18–24 h. MBC was defined as the lowest concentration of honey sample that killed  $\geq 99\%$  of bacteria. Meropenem for *S. Typhimurium* and gentamicin for *L. plantarum* served as positive controls of growth inhibition. The final antibiotic concentrations used in the assays ranged between 0.0015 and 3.84 mg/L for both antibiotics. The results were interpreted following EUCAST recommendations [51].

#### 4.5. Effect of Honeydew Samples on the Growth of *L. plantarum* in MRS Broth

The suspension of lactobacilli ( $10^6$  CFU/mL) in MRS broth was inoculated using different concentrations of honeys (1, 5 and 10%). After incubation for 24 h at 37 °C and 120 rpm (Unimax 1010; Heidolph Instruments GmbH & CO., KG, Schwabach, Germany), the number of lactobacilli was determined by plating ten-fold dilutions on MRS agar. The ability of the isolates to reduce the pH of the medium was tested (Mettler Toledo pH Meter).

#### 4.6. Effect of Co-Cultivation of *L. plantarum* and Honeydew Samples on *S. Typhimurium* Growth

To investigate the potentially synergistic effect of *L. plantarum* and HSs on *S. Typhimurium* growth, the concentration of HSs used was 5%. A bacterial suspension (*S. Typhimurium*) at a concentration of  $10^4$  CFU/mL and a suspension of lactobacilli at a concentration of  $10^6$  CFU/mL in BHI broth were prepared. A bacterial suspension of *S. Typhimurium* without the addition of HS and lactobacilli was used as the control. The individual effect of HS and the combined effect of HS and lactobacilli on *S. Typhimurium* growth were tested. In addition, the effect of glucose (10%) was tested individually and in combination with lactobacilli. The number of *S. Typhimurium* was monitored by plating tenfold dilutions of samples on *Salmonella Shigella* (SS) agar. The pH of the samples was also monitored at the end of the experiments.

#### 4.7. The Number of *L. plantarum* during Co-Cultivation

The number of lactobacilli was monitored during the previously described experiment (Section 4.6). The number of lactobacilli was determined by plating ten-fold dilutions on MRS agar.

#### 4.8. Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using analytic software Statistica 13.5.0.17. (TIBCO, Palo Alto, CA, USA). Statistical significance was tested on a significance level of  $p < 0.05$  by nonparametric Wilcoxon rank-sum test and verified with Mann–Whitney U test. Letters on top of columns present statistical significances. Results were graphically displayed using Microsoft Excel.

## 5. Conclusions

The combined combination of fir honeydew honey and probiotic bacteria *Lactiplantibacillus plantarum* can be more beneficial in inhibiting *S. Typhimurium* growth than their individual application. Fir honeydew honey shows potential prebiotic properties, with antimicrobial activity, both of which can enhance the probiotic efficacy of *L. plantarum* against *S. Typhimurium*.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, D.V. and I.G.; methodology, G.C., S.M., I.B.K., A.L. and T.P.; investigation, G.C., A.L. and S.M.; resources, I.G.; writing—original draft preparation, S.M., I.B.K., D.V. and I.G.; writing—review and editing, D.V., I.B.K. and I.G.; supervision, I.G. and D.V.; project administration, I.G. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** The research described here was funded by a grant from the University of Rijeka (uniri-biomed-18-171). We gratefully acknowledge the project “Analysis of rare unifloral honeys in Croatia”, funded by the Paying Agency for Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development (PAAFRD). We are also grateful for the project “Research infrastructure for campus-based laboratories at the University of Rijeka”, co-funded from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

1. Tischer Seraglio, S.K.; Silva, B.; Bergamo, G.; Brugnerotto, P.; Vlademiro Gonzaga, L.; Roseane, F.; Oliveira Costa, A.C. An overview of physicochemical characteristics and health-promoting properties of honeydew honey. *Food Res. Int.* **2019**, *119*, 44–66. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
2. Anthimidou, E.; Mossialos, D. Antibacterial activity of Greek and Cypriot honeys against *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* in comparison to manuka honey. *J. Med. Food* **2013**, *16*, 42–47. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
3. Kafantaris, I.; Tsadila, C.; Nikolaidis, M.; Tsavea, E.; Dimitrou, T.G.; Iliopoulos, I.; Amoutzias, G.D.; Mossialos, D. Transcriptomic analysis of *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* response to pine honey via RNA sequencing indicates multiple mechanisms of antibacterial activity. *Foods* **2021**, *10*, 936. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
4. Godocikova, J.; Bugarova, V.; Kast, C.; Majtan, V.; Majtan, J. Antibacterial potential of swiss honeys and characterisation of their bee-derived bioactive compounds. *J. Sci. Food Agric.* **2020**, *100*, 335–342. [CrossRef]
5. Gobin, I.; Crnković, G.; Magdalenić, M.; Begić, G.; Babić, A.; Lušić, D.; Vučković, D. Antibacterial potential of Croatian honey against antibiotic resistant pathogenic bacteria. *Med. Glas.* **2018**, *15*, 139–144.
6. Bucekova, M.; Buriova, M.; Pekarik, L.; Majtan, V.; Majtan, J. Phytochemicals-mediated production of hydrogen peroxide is crucial for high antibacterial activity of honeydew honey. *Sci. Rep.* **2018**, *8*, 9061. [CrossRef]
7. Mohan, A.; Quek, S.Y.; Guitierrez-Maddox, N.; Gao, Y.; Shu, Q. Effect of honey in improving the gut microbial balance. *Food Qual. Saf.* **2017**, *2*, 107–115. [CrossRef]
8. Ulrich Landry, B.K.; Moumita, S.; Jayabalan, R.; Zambou Ngoufack, F. Honey, probiotics and prebiotics: Review. *Res. J. Pharm. Biol. Chem.* **2016**, *7*, 2428–2438.
9. Zoričić, P. Functional characteristics of selected probiotic strains of *Lactobacillus plantarum* [In Croatian]. Graduation Thesis, University of Rijeka, Rijeka, Croatia, 2012.
10. Shokryazdan, P.; Siew, C.C.; Kalavathy, R.; Liang, J.B.; Alitheen, N.B.; Jahromi, M.F.; Ho, Y.W. Probiotic potential of *Lactobacillus* strains with antimicrobial activity against some human pathogenic strains. *BioMed Res. Int.* **2014**, *2014*, 927268. [CrossRef]
11. Hemarajata, P.; Versalovic, J. Effects of probiotics on gut microbiota: Mechanisms of intestinal immunomodulation and neuro-modulation. *Therap. Adv. Gastroenterol.* **2013**, *6*, 39–51. [CrossRef]
12. Harvard Medical School. Health Benefits of Taking Probiotics. *Harv. Health Lett.* **2020**. Available online: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/vitamins-and-supplements/health-benefits-of-taking-probiotics> (accessed on 13 April 2020).
13. Ustunol, Z.; Ghandi, H. Growth and viability of commercial *Bifidobacterium* spp. in honey-sweetened skim milk. *J. Food Prot.* **2001**, *64*, 1775–1779. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
14. Shruti, S.; Sreeja, V.; Jashbhai, P.B. Development of synbiotic lassi containing honey: Studies on probiotic viability, product characteristics and shelf life. *Ind. J. Dairy Sci.* **2016**, *69*, 148–153.
15. Shmala, T.R.; Shri Jyothi, Y.; Saibaba, P. Stimulatory effect of honey on multiplication of lactic acid bacteria under in vitro and in vivo conditions. *Lett. Appl. Microbiol.* **2001**, *30*, 453–455. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
16. Graham, S.M.; Molyneux, E.M.; Walsh, A.L.; Cheesbrough, J.S.; Molyneux, M.E.; Hart, C.A. Nontyphoidal *Salmonella* infections of children in tropical Africa. *J. Pediatr. Infect. Dis.* **2000**, *19*, 1189–1196. [CrossRef]
17. Vojdani, J.D.; Beuchat, L.R.; Tauxe, R.V. Juice-associated outbreaks of human illness in the United States 1995 through 2005. *J. Food Prot.* **2008**, *71*, 356–364. [CrossRef]
18. Von Der Ohe, W.; Oddo, L.; Piana, M.; Morlot, M.; Martin, P. Harmonized methods of melissopalinalogy. *Apidologie* **2004**, *35*, 18–25. [CrossRef]
19. Bogdanov, S.; Lüllmann, C.; Martin, P.; von der Ohe, W.; Russmann, H.; Vorwohl, G.; Persano Oddo, L.; Sabatini, A.G.; Marazzan, G.L.; Piro, R.; et al. Honey quality and international regulatory standards: Review by the International Honey Commission. *Bee World* **1999**, *80*, 61–69. [CrossRef]
20. Broznić, D.; Malenica Staver, M.; Kraljević Pavelić, S.; Gobin, I. Evaluation of the antioxidant capacity, antimicrobial and antiproliferative potential of fir (*Abies alba* Mill.) honeydew honey collected from Gorski kotar (Croatia). *Food Tech. Biotech.* **2018**, *56*, 533–545. [CrossRef]
21. Majtan, J.; Majtanova, L.; Bohova, J.; Majtan, V. Honeydew honey as a potent antibacterial agent in eradication of multi-drug resistant *Stenotrophomonas maltophilia* isolates from cancer patients. *Phytother. Res.* **2011**, *25*, 584–587. [CrossRef]
22. Perez Martin, R.A.; Hortiguera, L.V.; Lorenzo, P.; Cortina, M.D.R.; de Lorenzo, C. In vitro antioxidant and antimicrobial activities of Spanish honeys. *Int. J. Food Prop.* **2008**, *11*, 727–737. [CrossRef]
23. Sagdic, O.; Silici, S.; Ekici, L. Evaluation of the phenolic content, antiradical, antioxidant, and antimicrobial activity of different floral sources of honey. *Int. J. Food Prop.* **2013**, *16*, 658–666. [CrossRef]

24. Spilioti, E.; Jaakkola, M.; Tolonen, T.; Lipponen, M.; Virtanen, V.; Chinou, I.; Kassi, E.; Karabournioti, S.; Moutsatsou, P. Phenolic acid composition, antiatherogenic and anticancer potential of honeys derived from various regions in Greece. *PLoS ONE* **2014**, *9*, e94860. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
25. Bertonec, J.; Golob, T.; Kropf, U.; Korošec, M. Characterisation of Slovenian honeys on the basis of sensory and physicochemical analysis with a chemometric approach. *Int. J. Food Sci. Tech.* **2011**, *46*, 1661–1671. [[CrossRef](#)]
26. Bertonec, J.; Doberšek, U.; Korošec, M.; Golob, T. Evaluation of the phenolic content, antioxidant activity and colour of Slovenian honey. *Food Chem.* **2007**, *105*, 822–828. [[CrossRef](#)]
27. Kuš, P.M.; Jerković, I.; Marijanović, Z.; Tuberoso, C.I.G. Screening of Polish fir honeydew honey using GC/MS, HPLC-DAD, and physical-chemical parameters: Benzene derivatives and terpenes as chemical markers. *Chem. Biodivers.* **2017**, *14*, e1700179. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
28. Bertonec, J.; Polak, T.; Kropf, U.; Korošec, M.; Golob, T. LC-DAD/ESI-MS analysis of flavonoids and abscisic acid with chemometric approach for the classification of Slovenian honey. *Food Chem.* **2011**, *127*, 296–302. [[CrossRef](#)]
29. Macedo, L.N.; Luchese, R.H.; Guerra, A.F.; Barbarosa, C.G. Prebiotic effect of honey on growth and viability of *Bifidobacterium* spp. and *Lactobacillus* spp. in milk. *Cienc. Tecnol.* **2008**, *28*, 935–942.
30. Popa, D.; Ustunol, Z. Influence of sucrose, high fructose corn syrup and honey from different floral sources on growth and acid production by lactic acid bacteria and bifidobacteria. *Int. J. Dairy Technol.* **2011**, *64*, 247–253. [[CrossRef](#)]
31. Sanz, M.L.; Polemis, N.; Morales, V.; Corzo, N.; Drakoularakou, A.; Gibson, G.R.; Rastall, R.A. In vitro investigation into the potential prebiotic. *J. Agric. Food.* **2005**, *53*, 2914–2921. [[CrossRef](#)]
32. Krauze, A.; Zalewski, R.I. Classification of honeys by principal component analysis on the basis of chemical and physical parameters. *Z. Für Lebensm.-Unters. Und Forsch.* **1991**, *192*, 19–23. [[CrossRef](#)]
33. Kaškoienė, V.; Venskutonis, P.R. Floral markers in honey of various botanical and geographic origins: A review. *Comp. Rev.* **2010**, *9*, 620–634.
34. Bogdanov, S.; Martin, P. Honey authenticity. *Mitt. Aus Lebensm. Und Hyg.* **2002**, *93*, 232–254.
35. Gibson, G.R.; Fuller, R. Aspects of in vitro and in vivo research approaches directed toward identifying probiotics and prebiotics for human use. *J. Nutr.* **2000**, *130*, 391–395. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
36. Kanmani, P.; Satishi Kumar, R.; Paari, K.A.; Pattukumar, V.; Arul, V. Probiotics and its functionally valuable products—a review. *Crit. Rev. Food Sci. Nutr.* **2013**, *53*, 641–658. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
37. Travers, M.A.; Florent, I.; Kohl, L.; Grellire, P. Probiotics for the control of parasites: An overview. *J. Parasitol. Res.* **2011**, *2011*, 610769. [[CrossRef](#)]
38. Alizadeh Behbajani, B.; Noshad, M.; Falah, F. Inhibition of *Escherichia coli* adhesion to human intestinal Caco-2 cells by probiotic candidate *Lactobacillus plantarum* strain L15. *Microb. Pathog.* **2019**, *136*, 103677. [[CrossRef](#)]
39. Fonesca, H.C.; de Sousa Melo, D.; Lacerda Ramos, C.; Ribeiro Dias, D.; Freitas Schwan, R. Probiotic properties of lactobacilli and their ability to inhibit the adhesion of enteropathogenic bacteria to Caco-2 and HT-29 cells. *Probiotics Antimicrob. Protein.* **2021**, *13*, 102–112. [[CrossRef](#)]
40. Lin, J.; Lee, I.S.; Slonczewski, J.L.; Foster, J.W. Comparative analysis of extreme acid survival in *Salmonella typhimurium*, *Shigella flexneri*, and *Escherichia coli*. *J. Bacteriol.* **1995**, *177*, 4097–4104. [[CrossRef](#)]
41. Brennen, K.E.; Willingham, C.; Kong, W.; Curtis, R., 3rd; Roland, K.L. Low-pH rescue of acid-sensitive *Salmonella enterica* serovar Typhi strains by a rhamnose-regulated arginine decarboxylase system. *J. Bacteriol.* **2013**, *195*, 3062–3072. [[CrossRef](#)]
42. Kajiwara, S.; Gandhi, H.; Ustunol, Z. Effect of honey on the growth of and acid production by human intestinal *Bifidobacterium* spp.: An in vitro comparison with commercial oligosaccharides and inulin. *J. Food Prot.* **2002**, *65*, 214–218. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
43. Jan Mei, S.; Mohd Nordin, M.S.; Norrakiah, A.S. Fructooligosaccharides in honey and effects of honey on growth of *Bifidobacterium longum* BB 536. *Int. Food Res. J.* **2010**, *17*, 557–561.
44. Janković, T.; Frece, J.; Abram, M.; Gobin, I. Aggregation ability of potential probiotic *Lactobacillus plantarum* strains. *Int. J. Sanit. Eng. Res.* **2012**, *6*, 19–24.
45. Jiang, L.; Xie, M.; Chen, G.; Qiao, J.; Zhang, H.; Zeng, X. Phenolics and carbohydrates in buckwheat honey regulate the human intestinal microbiota. *Evid.-Based Complement. Altern. Med.* **2020**, *2020*, 6432942. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
46. Nagpal, R.; Kaur, A. Synbiotic effect of various prebiotics on in vitro activities of probiotic lactobacilli. *Ecol. Food Nutr.* **2011**, *50*, 63–68. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
47. Louveaux, J.; Maurizio, A.; Vorwohl, G. Methods of melissopalynology. *Bee World* **1978**, *59*, 139–157. [[CrossRef](#)]
48. Bogdanov, S. *Harmonised Methods of the International Honey Commission*; International Honey Commission Bremen: Bremen, Germany, 2009.
49. Meda, A.; Lamien, C.E.; Romito, M.; Millogo, J.; Nacoulma, O.G. Determination of the total phenolic, flavonoid and proline contents in Burkina Faso honey, as well as their radical scavenging activity. *Food Chem.* **2005**, *91*, 571–577. [[CrossRef](#)]
50. Potočnjak, M.; Pušić, P.; Frece, J.; Abram, M.; Janković, T.; Gobin, I. Three new *Lactobacillus plantarum* strains in the probiotic toolbox against gut pathogen *Salmonella enterica* serotype Typhimurium. *Food Technol. Biotechnol.* **2017**, *55*, 48–54. [[CrossRef](#)]
51. The European Committee on Antimicrobial Susceptibility Testing. *Breakpoint Tables for Interpretation of MICs and Zone Diameters*; EUCAST: Växjö, Sweden, 2021.