

## **NLB: FOOD SAFETY AND YOUR HONEY\***

*This is an overview as of the legal requirements for Food Hygiene & Safety as of May 2014 but all beekeepers should keep up to date with changes in legislation and if unsure should seek advice from their local Environmental Health Officer as well as the British Beekeepers Association [BBKA].*

*This document should be read in conjunction with the BBKA Leaflet 'Selling Honey, Complying with the Law' which is attached at the end of this document.*

### **Q1. Do I need a Food Hygiene Certificate validated by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health?**

A1. Not if you are a 'small producer' but you should certainly follow good practice principles as you need to demonstrate 'due diligence' and that you have reasonable controls as well as up-to-date records to minimise harm to the consumer.

### **Q2. Do I need to register with the Local Environmental Health Officer?**

A2. Not if you occasionally sell some jars of your honey at a local fete or similar event. If you are selling through a third party or throughout the year it is best practice to contact your local Environmental Health Officers for advice who may wish to inspect your bottling and storage areas. They have the powers to inspect you whether or not you have contacted them. In the past, members of NLB selling honey have been inspected.

### **Q3. What are the key controls to reduce the hazard of chemical contamination via honey production in my apiary?**

A3. Follow this good practice:

- Ensure that the hives are treated with a non-toxic preservative suitable for bees.
- Do not use PDB [para dichloro benzene] for wax moth control as it can accumulate in wax; never use a product that contains naphthalene as it is poisonous to bees.
- Only use proprietary hive cleaners and follow manufacturers' instructions.
- Use only approved veterinary medicines and fully comply with the treatment regime, particularly when treatment is restricted until after the honey harvest. Record details of all medication administered to a colony.
- MAQS is currently the only chemical treatment for varroa which is licensed to be used when hives have super[s] of honey.
- If treatments other than MAQS are used when supers are on the hive then these treated supers should be clearly marked, as should the frames of honey, so as to ensure that these are not extracted by mistake and therefore contaminate honey for human consumption. One can however include these frames of honey in the hive's winter stores. It is very important however that in Spring these identifiable frames are sterilised and fresh wax foundation added or the treatment residue in the old wax could contaminate the following year's harvest. Record what you have done.
- Keep good, clear records for your own use and in case the local Environmental Health Officer asks to see how you operate your honey production.

**Q4. What am I obliged to do about toxins in forage my bees might collect?**

A4. No controls needed in the UK.

**Q5. What are the requirements for the premises I might use for honey extraction and bottling?**

A5. Follow this good practice:

- All surfaces must be washable, easy to clean and disinfect including walls and floors.
- Ceilings must be constructed to prevent accumulation of dirt.
- Two sinks should ideally be available, one for hand washing and one for the equipment.
- Keep all doors and windows closed.
- Domestic animals, such as dogs and cats, must be banned from the area.
- The premises should be free from vermin e.g. rodents and insects eg cockroaches and flies, nor should there be any small areas in the premises where they might hide.

**Q6 As a handler in honey production what are my personal obligations?**

A6. Follow this good practice when extracting and bottling:

- Keep yourself and the workplace really clean.
- Follow good hygiene practice e.g. regular hand washing.
- Protect the honey from contamination or anything that could cause harm.
- Wear appropriate clean clothing and footwear.
- Smoking in the area is obviously prohibited.

**Q7. What are the key controls for ensuring my honey is not damaged by physical or bacterial contamination ?**

A7. Follow this good practice:

- When extracting honey use equipment made of food grade stainless steel, food grade plastic and glass. Ensure that this equipment is clean.
- Filter honey to remove physical contaminants e.g. bee debris and wax. The recommended mesh size is 0.2mm which ensures some pollen remains.
- Ensure all equipment is put away clean after use and stored in hygienic conditions.
- Minimise wax moth in the hive and minimise storage times of honey in frames. Freeze comb to be used for cut comb and chunk honey to kill any wax moth eggs and larvae.
- Ensure that supers are not placed directly on the ground when manipulating bees.
- Ensure any equipment or vehicle used to transport supers is clean. Line vehicles with clean plastic sheeting or stand supers in food-safe trays.

**Q8. How can I reduce the risk of spoilage from microbiological action?**

A8. Honey is hygroscopic so will absorb atmospheric moisture and can result in fermentation of the stored product. Recommended actions include:

- Ensure all equipment is thoroughly washed and dried before use.
- Ensure that your hands are dry after washing them.
- Only extract from fully ripe combs.
- Extract and bottle in a low humidity environment.
- Store honey in hermetically sealed containers and tighten jar lids fully.
- Use new lids and where possible fit anti tamper seals.
- Consider testing your honey with a refractometer to check the water content as it should be below 20%; however if above 20% honey can be sold as 'Bakers Honey' for use in cooking.

**Q9. Is it acceptable to heat honey when extracting or processing it?**

A9. Avoid heating the honey unnecessarily as it can result in the breakdown of the sugar fructose to Hydroxymethylfurfuraldehyde (HMF). Important regulations about honey that has been heated are specified in BBKA leaflet at the end of this document.

**Q10. Can I re-use glass honey jars and what is the best way to sterilise my honey jars?**

A10. Yes you can re-use clean, un-chipped honey jars but you should purchase new lids. All jars whether new or recycled must be of food grade standard and must be washed, as should the new lids. They are best washed in hot detergent and then rinsed in a solution of Milton following the instructions. Alternatively a dishwasher with a working temperature of 65°C or higher is sufficient. Always make sure that that containers are freshly sterilised and dry before use.

**Q11. How long can I keep my honey before sale?      How should I label my honey?**

A11. There are legal requirements that must be adhered to when labelling honey for sale; this includes a 'Best Before' date which is usually between two and five years. You should keep good records about production dates, batch numbers etc, and practice stock rotation to minimise storage. The strict regulations about labelling honey are fully detailed in the leaflet at the end of this document.

**Q12. Is it true that honey can make babies ill?**

A12. Yes, although honey is a natural product and you will have taken great care in extracting and storing it, it may contain the spores of the Botulism bacteria that will not make adults ill but could be harmful to young babies. Botulism is present in soil, which is one of the reasons supers should not be placed directly on the ground. At present we are not required by law to make any statement on honey labels but it is good practice to state 'honey should not be given to infants under 12 months of age'.

\* N.B. These notes were compiled by NLB members Amanda Hayes, Liz Jack and Alison Kahane who attended and passed the certificated course 'Level 2 Food Safety and Hygiene,' in May 2014, which was facilitated by John Dunne, Environmental Health Officer and authorised trainer Chartered Institute of Environmental Health to level 4, together with Andrew Pedley, Environmental Health Officer and past President of the Middlesex Federation of Bee-Keepers.

31<sup>th</sup> July 2014



# Selling Honey

## Complying with the Law

*This leaflet has been produced to help small scale beekeepers who wish to sell their honey. It highlights and explains relevant honey and health and safety regulations.*

*It makes practical suggestions to enable the beekeeper to comply with the law.*

*If you have any doubts or concerns don't hesitate to contact your local Trading Standards department who are always willing to help.*

### **The regulations specify:-**

- The water content of the honey must be not more than 20%. The higher the water content the more likely the honey is to ferment. A refractometer may be used to indicate the water content of honey.
- The percentages of invert sugars and sucrose must be consistent with that expected from the floral source. No problem here if you use your own honey.
- The honey shall not have been heated in such a way as to significantly destroy enzymes and drive off the volatile aromatic compounds which give each type of honey its unique quality.  
If honey is warmed for extraction and bottling it is advisable to keep the temperature below 35°C and to cool quickly. For pasteurisation a temperature of 63°C is needed for 30 minutes followed by rapid cooling. Honey is best preserved by storing at a constantly cool temperature, preferably 12°C or lower.
- The honey should be free from mould, insects, insect debris, brood and any other organic or inorganic substance foreign to the composition of honey.  
Take care to minimise the introduction of foreign materials into the extraction room. The honey must be filtered to remove any foreign materials. The recommended mesh size is 0.2 mm which will ensure that some pollen remains. The extraction room and all equipment should be washed thoroughly before and after extraction.
- Containers should be made of materials which under normal and foreseeable conditions of use do not transfer their constituents to the honey in quantities which could endanger human health or bring about a deterioration in its aroma, taste, texture or colour.

Equipment made of food grade stainless steel, food grade plastic and glass meet these criteria.

### **Labelling**

The label should indicate (see reverse for details) –

1. The description of the product.
2. The name and address of the producer (within the EU).
3. The country of origin.
4. A 'Best before' date.
5. A lot mark. This could be the "Best before" date see 4.
6. The weight.

### **1. Description of product**

This must be one of the following reserved descriptions:

- Honey.
- Comb honey.
- Chunk honey.
- Baker's honey intended for cooking only.
- The word 'honey' with any other true description e.g. Honeydew honey, Pressed honey, Blossom honey.
- The word 'honey' with a regional, topographical or territorial reference.

If there is any reference to a particular plant or blossom (this includes both pictures and words), the honey must have come wholly or mainly from that blossom or plant - i.e. the honey must be characterised by that blossom or plant. If reference is made to a geographical origin the honey must come wholly from that place.

### **2. Name and address of producer, importer, packer etc.**

Sufficient information is needed in order to trace the producer by an address within the EU.

### **3. Country of origin**

Honey must be labelled with the country/ies in which the honey was harvested. This may be a member state of the EU. In our case it could be 'Product of the UK' or 'Product of England' but must be IN ADDITION to the address.

### **4. Best before date**

Honey will keep in good condition for many years if it is kept in an airtight container at a constantly low temperature but an appropriate durability or 'Best before' date must be given. Two years from the date of bottling is reasonable. If this specifies day month and year, a lot number is not required.

### **5. Lot Number**

A lot means a batch of sales units of food produced, manufactured or packaged under similar conditions. It enables problems to be traced. The lot number is preceded by the letter "L" to distinguish it from other indicators. The number may be a short code comprising letters and/or numbers identifying the appropriate batch. It is prudent to have small lot sizes.

The beekeeper is required to keep a record of each batch with its provenance and destination and retain this for the shelf life plus 6 months.

For direct sales like farmers markets or sales at the door lot numbers and 'Best before' dates are not needed.

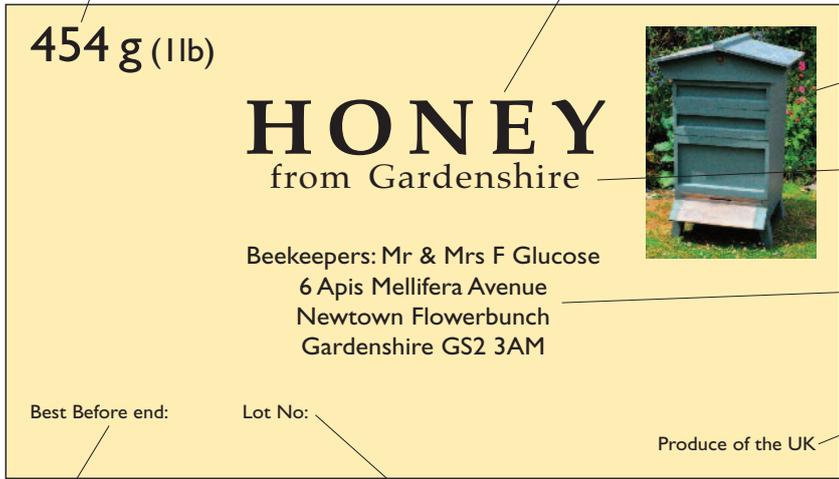
### **6. The weight**

Honey can be sold in any weight including the traditional UK ones. Imperial units can be added after the metric ones but must not be in larger type and there must be no other print between them.

The abbreviation for gram is "g" and for kilogram is "kg". An "s" must not be added. There must be one type space between the numerical value and the unit or its abbreviation.

6. Height of metric figures varies with weight. Metric figures must precede Imperial figures if used.

1. Descriptor must not mislead and should conform to reserved descriptions.



1. Illustration must not mislead.

1. The Honey must come entirely from identified source.

2. The Name and Address of producer, packer or seller.

3. It is mandatory to include the Country of Origin.

4. Suggest 2 years. If day/month/year quoted, the Lot No: is not required.

5. The L precedes the Lot Number (ie the Batch Identification Code).

**Printing of labels**

Printing must be clearly legible and permanent. Labels should be fixed to the side of the container. The lettering must be 3 mm high for weights between 50 and 200 g, 4 mm high for weights between 200 g and 1 kg and 6 mm high for greater weights. Only the weight declarations have to be the specified size.

The criterion for the size of all the other statutory information is that it must be easy to understand, clearly legible, indelible, not interrupted by other written or pictorial matter and in a conspicuous place such as to be easily visible. The information given on the label must be true in every respect and in no way misleading.

It is suggested that computer generated labels have the height of the lettering checked before printing a batch.

**Food hygiene**

Registration of premises does not apply to the direct supply by the producer of small quantities of primary products to the final consumer or to local retail establishments directly supplying the final consumer.

However, the BBKA does recommend that beekeepers who offer honey for sale familiarise themselves with the basic hazards and practices in food handling.

The Royal Society for Public Health [www.rsph.org](http://www.rsph.org) provides information on this subject and courses run by some local authorities lead to the RSPH Certificate in food hygiene awareness.

Changes in legislation and regulations can affect the accuracy of this leaflet. The latest issue and further information can be found on the BBKA web-site [www.bbka.org.uk](http://www.bbka.org.uk)

Further guidance on the Honey Regulations 2005 can be obtained from the Food Standards Agency.

**General points:**

This leaflet is one of a series intended to help beekeepers and non-beekeepers. If you believe the contents of this leaflet are relevant to you, please seek further advice from an experienced beekeeper or your tutor.

Information is updated regularly – please check with the BBKA web site at: [www.bbka.org.uk](http://www.bbka.org.uk) – for the latest information.

This leaflet supersedes: (B10 2009 4th edition).

Note: The same information is published in our printed leaflet L010 available from the BBKA.

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