

Introduction to Cottage Foods

Cottage Food Operators in California must specifically meet the following requirements:

- Register with the local Environmental Health Agency
- Only market cottage foods on the approved food list through either indirect and/or direct sales to consumers
- Complete a food processor training course
- Implement sanitary food preparation operations
- Create compliant labels
- Operate within established annual gross sales limit

Cottage Food Operators will also have to obtain approval from their local planning department, which might have other requirements.

Product Possibilities

Allowable products under the Cottage Food Law include:

- Honey: plain, pure, and simple in all its varieties, liquid, comb, whipped, flavored
- Baked goods with honey
- Fruit preserves, jams, and jellies with honey
- Nuts, dried fruit, and fruit leathers made with honey

Market Outlook

Cottage foods are niche products of particular interest to consumers desiring locally produced and artisanal foods. The demand for honey and foods made with honey is increasing. Part of this may be due to consumers perceiving that honey is natural, pure, and local and because they associate honey with helping bees.



Planning & Production

Management Considerations

Honey is expensive and may be cost prohibitive as an ingredient in recipes. Extracting and processing honey requires specialized equipment. Sometimes used processing equipment can be found for an inexpensive price.

Sources for Product Ingredients (Raw Product)

Honey can be purchased locally at farmers market. The National Honey Board's Honey Locator has a list of honey producers by area (www.honey.com.) California requires that all ingredients used in cottage foods must come from an "Approved Source." Included in this are licensed commercial sellers, such as retailers and distributors. Farmers who are certified with their County Agricultural Commissioner can use their own commercially grown fruits, vegetables, nuts, herbs, and honey. Some counties have developed approved source programs for operators of community or culinary gardens who self-certify their management practices.

Standards for Goods

The CA Food and Agriculture Code (Div.13, Chp.2) covers standards for honey including grading of honey using the Pfund honey scale. Note that eventually all honey that has not been overheated or filtered through a fine mesh screen will crystallize. The more glucose relative to water, the faster honey will crystallize. This is a natural process, but can be undesirable for consumers.

Planning & Production (cont'd)

Production

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Food Safety

Honey is a low risk food because of its antimicrobial properties. However, it should not be fed to infants. Honey can spoil, or ferment, with the addition of water. Some honeys are naturally high in moisture; if they are over 18% moisture (use a refractometer) the honey may ferment on its own.

Marketing

Overview

All Cottage Food Operations must be registered or permitted by the local environmental health agency before starting business. Class A Cottage Food Operators may sell honey goods at farmers markets, roadside stands, and Community Supported Agriculture programs directly to customers. Class B Cottage Food Operators may also sell to retailers. A Class A Cottage Food Operators will get a higher price for each product, but will also incur higher marketing costs than when selling wholesale.

Labeling

Design and print a label that expresses the business's personality and brand. All food made by a Cottage Food Operator must be labeled properly with an approved label which states "made in a home kitchen" in 12 point type, along with a descriptive name of the product, the contact information and location of the Cottage Food Operator, the permit/registration number, an ingredient list in descending order of weight, the net quantity in English units and metric units, and a declaration of food allergens. In addition, honey must meet the California Food and Agriculture Code covering quality, packaging and labeling.

Allergens

Very few people are allergic to honey.

Storage & Packaging

Precautions should be taken to minimize crystallization and physical and chemical changes during storage. Ideally, store unprocessed and processed honey below 32°F to preserve aroma, flavor and color. Crystallization is most rapid at 52-59°F. Bottle at 104°F or higher (up to 130-140°F) to slow crystallization. Store unpackaged honey in air-tight containers (eg. sanitized and sealed stainless steel drums) to protect from external moisture. Shelf-life is difficult to define, but 2 years is often stated. Bottling honey requires food grade packaging, including glass jars or squeezable plastic containers so that consumers can see the honey's color. Select both functional and attractive packaging; elaborate glass jars get higher retail price.



Resources

UC Davis Honey & Pollination Center:

<https://honey.ucdavis.edu/>

National Honey Board:

<http://www.honey.com/>

Honey, Beekeeping & Processing Supplies:

[Sacramento Honey Company](#), [Beekind](#), [Mann Lake](#)

Magazines:

[Bee Culture](#) and [American Bee Journal](#)

The Backyard Beekeeper by Kim Flottum

The Backyard Beekeeper's Honey Handbook by Kim Flottum

Beekeeping for Dummies by Howland Blackiston