

Honey Labelling Legal Requirements

Honey must comply with several sets of regulations for the product itself and the labelling of the package – Local Trading Standards officers are responsible for enforcement. This document summarises the key requirements of current legislation to the author’s knowledge.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

PRODUCT NAME

Only permitted names can be used – see endnote for full list.ⁱ For most hobbyist beekeepers the ones of use are likely to be: Honey, Nectar Honey, Blossom Honey, Cut Comb in Honey/ Chunk Honey, and Comb Honey.

Geographic or topographical information can be added e.g. Sussex Honey or Mountain Honey – the honey must come from the area. *A village, house or farm name would not meet the labelling regulations but there are ways around this: e.g. ‘KENTISH HONEY from Blossom Farm’.*

Pure, Raw, and Natural have no legal meaning in UK/EU law but can be included to make the product more attractive. **Local** too depending on where your honey is sold.

The label must be accurate. *Given the range of foraging honey bees it is, except for heather honey, impossible in the UK to harvest honey from a predominant floral source. So Lavender Honey is probably out, Oil Seed Rape honey is distinctive but probably would not make for an attractive label. Although images of flowers are not specifically excluded these too could be taken as a claim that the nectar was predominantly from the flower shown and should not be used.*

QUANTITY

Honey can be sold in any quantity. The net quantity in grams must be on the packaging, an imperial quantity may also be included but must follow the metric marking e.g. **340g** (12 oz).

For most popular quantities (227g, 340g, 454g) the metric quantity marking must be a minimum of 4mm in height – imperial marking can be any height but always less than the metric marking. *In the author’s opinion there is nothing to be gained by including imperial quantity.*

DURABILITY

Honey must be given a best before date. This gives rise to arguments about how long honey lasts but the Best before date up to which the honey will retain its taste or texture from the condition it was when the customer bought it. It is still safe to eat after that date.

Given that all honey will granulate at some point this date is almost impossible to predict – it can be weeks or months from when the honey was bottled. But this is never challenged in this author’s experience – two years is usual. BBEⁱⁱ 2020 for example and is a simple format. There is little point in defining a month as well – it suggests an accuracy that doesn’t exist. It is tempting to use a date five years ahead to make sure that the labels will all be used well before the date shown. In my opinion it is better to order smaller quantities of labels or to have labels with a year and write it on if you produce small quantities of honey.

A granulation advice label can be added to explain about granulation and how to return it to liquid (if that’s what it was at purchase).ⁱⁱⁱ

FOOD BUSINESS OPERATOR'S DETAILS

The name and physical address of the person (or organisation) who takes responsibility for the product and labelling. Usually this is the beekeeper. You can use a full address or keep it short so long as you could be found at the address. *For example a house number or house name and postcode would be sufficient.*

ORIGIN

The country or state where the honey comes from. *There is no specific form for this so “English Honey”, “English Produce” and “Product of UK” etc. are all ok. Can I add the country at the end of my address? No - because there is nothing wrong, in law, in buying French honey and selling it in the UK as French Honey with your name and address as the food business operator.*

BATCH/LOT NUMBER

To identify all honey produced at the same time – all honey bottled at the same time from the same bottling tank without refilling it. Keep a record and if there is a problem – e.g. honey not fully ripe and starting to ferment in the jar, you should be able to identify other jars that may be affected. *You won't have a record of every customer who bought your honey so how you publicise the problem is likely to depend on how you sell your honey. Put up a sign where you sell to let customers know to return the product. Using the same batch number for all labels is not recommended. In the event of a problem with one jar would mean that all your production should be 'recalled'. A way around this is to have labels with unique lot numbers and make a note of the first and last number used for each batch.*

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit the author's website: bespokelabels.net or email him john@bespokelabels.net.

ⁱ Permitted product names: “baker's honey” means honey that is suitable for industrial use or as an ingredient in another foodstuff which is then processedⁱ; “blossom honey” and “nectar honey” mean honeys obtained from the nectar of plants; “chunk honey” and “cut comb in honey” mean honeys which contain one or more pieces of comb honey; “comb honey” means honey stored by bees in the cells of freshly built broodless combs or thin comb foundation sheets made solely of beeswax and sold in sealed whole combs or sections of such combs; “drained honey” means honey obtained by draining de-capped broodless combs; “extracted honey” means honey obtained by centrifuging de-capped broodless combs; “filtered honey” means honey obtained by removing foreign inorganic or organic matters in such a way as to result in the significant removal of pollen; “honeydew honey” means honey obtained mainly from excretions of plant sucking insects (Hemiptera) on the living part of plants or secretions of living parts of plants; “pressed honey” means honey obtained by pressing broodless combs with or without the application of moderate heat not exceeding 45° Celsius.

ⁱⁱ BBE - Best Before End

ⁱⁱⁱ When honey granulates in the jar the glucose becomes solid at the bottom of the jar with a mainly fructose liquid in a layer above it – the fructose liquid sugar content is low enough for liquid to ferment giving a bad smell and taste to the honey.