

# **Business Guidance leaflet**

## **Guidance notes for honey packers**

### **Honey Regulations 2003**

### **Food Labelling Regulations 1996**

### **Weights and Measures Act 1985**

**Application: For sales of honey to the ultimate consumer or to a catering establishment.**

### **General**

Honey which is prepacked should be labelled with the following:

- The name
- The name or trade name and address of the producer or packer, or of a seller within the EC
- The country or countries of origin
- Any special storage conditions
- A 'best before' date
- A lot mark
- The weight

### **Name**

This should be the one that is prescribed by law. The product may only be called 'honey' if it complies with the prescribed compositional standards and has had no other ingredient added to it. The name must consist of or include one of the following descriptions:

- Blossom or nectar honey
- Honeydew honey
- Comb honey
- Chunk honey or cut comb in honey
- Drained honey
- Extracted honey
- Pressed honey
- Filtered honey
- Baker's honey

**Note:** In the case of 'blossom honey', 'nectar honey', 'honeydew honey', 'drained honey' and 'pressed honey', the name applied may be either the appropriate reserved description or simply 'honey'. Additional clarifying words may be applied to the name e.g. 'clear', 'natural', etc, provided they do not mislead.

It is common practice to filter honey under pressure to remove unwanted matter, e.g. small pieces of comb, dead bees, etc, and it is acceptable to treat honey in this way without it being required to be labelled "filtered honey." However, where fine filters are used such that a significant amount of pollen is removed e.g. where honey is finely filtered to improve the shelf life and clarity, the product must be described as "filtered honey," and not simply "honey."

Where baker's honey and filtered honey are sold in bulk containers, the full product name must appear on both the container and on any accompanying trade documents.

Baker's honey sold in its own right as a food must be accompanied by the words "intended for cooking only." However, when used as an ingredient in a food, the reserved description need only be listed in the ingredients list if it has not been used in the name of the food e.g. 'Honey Cake'.

### **Country or countries of origin**

Honey must be labelled with the country or countries in which the honey was harvested. Where the honey is a blend of honeys harvested from more than one country, as an alternative to listing the various countries of origin, one of the following statements may be used, as appropriate:

"Blend of EC honeys"

"Blend of non EC honeys"

"Blend of EC and non-EC honeys"

Such descriptions can also be tested by analysis.

If there is any reference to a particular plant or blossom (this can be pictures or 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 (e.g. Mexican), the honey must come wholly from that country or place.

Baker's honey and filtered honey may not be labelled with additional information relating to its floral or vegetable origin; its regional or territorial or topographical origin; or its specific quality criteria.

### **Durability indication & storage conditions**

A durability indication in the form of a 'best before' date must be applied to most packaged foods. Honey which is intended to have a shelf life in excess of three months, is required to be marked with at least a month and a year, e.g. "Best before end Oct 2005." However, in order to be able to identify a particular batch of honey (see below), you may wish to also include the day, e.g. "Best before : 30 Oct 2005".

Storage conditions that need to be observed for the food to maintain its quality until the date shown must also be marked on the label.

### **Lot marking**

Each jar of honey should have a code on it that identifies it with a single batch. This could be all the honey which is packed in one day, for example. You can use a best before date (if it indicates at least a day and month), a number, or some other code. If you do not use a date, it may be best to put an "L" in front of the code to make it clear that it is a lot mark. The lot mark can appear anywhere on the jar unless you are using the best before date as the lot mark.

Honey sold only from the premises on which it was packed does not need to be lot marked. However, it is advisable to lot mark all jars anyway, so that if there is a problem, the honey can be easily traced back to the batch from which it came.

### **General provisions**

Any information required to be given must appear either on the packaging; on a label attached to the packaging or on a label clearly visible through the packaging. The ticket or label must be easy to understand and indelible. Such information must not be hidden, obscured or interrupted by any other written or pictorial matter.

Where honey is sold loose or prepacked for direct sale, the labelling information may appear on a label, ticket or notice that is readily discernible to the intending purchaser.

Where honey is sold other than to the ultimate consumer, the required labelling information may be provided in an accompanying commercial document.

### **Weight marking**

With the exception of chunk honey and comb honey, honey may only be packed in certain metric quantities. These are as follows:

57g, 113g, 227g, 340g, 454g, 680g, or a multiple of 454g.

The imperial equivalent may also be shown, i.e. 2oz, 4oz, 8oz, 12oz, 1lb, 1 1/2lb, and multiples of 1lb.

The metric indication must be more prominent, and for most packs it must be at least 4mm high. The imperial marking must be no larger than the metric one. Note that the quantity shown should be the net weight, i.e. the

weight of the honey without the weight of the jar, lid and label.

The weight marking, name of the honey, and the best before date should be in the same field of vision.

### **Weight control**

Honey can be filled to either minimum quantity (each jar should be at or above the declared weight), or to average weight.

For minimum weight, each jar or container must be individually weighed on a scale

that has been tested and approved for trade use.

For average weight, there are certain rules - the 'Packers Rules' - which must be followed. These allow for some weights to be a certain amount below the weight shown on the jar, provided that the average weight is equal to or above that weight. If you feel you need a copy of the packers rules, please ask your local Trading Standards Service.

The easiest thing to do is to fill each jar either by eye or on a scale, then check a few from each batch and make sure that the weights are all at or above the weight declared. For this check, you should use a scale which you know is accurate - a stamped shop scale is ideal. You must remember to take away the weight of the empty jar and lid. To get this tare weight, weigh ten jars plus lids and use the weight of the heaviest.

If you find that some of the weights of full jars are low, you will need to weigh every jar from that batch, and remove all the ones that are low. You can then top these up and re-check them.

You should keep a note of the checks you have made, which should include the time and date of weighings, the weights found, and what the weight should have been. You should keep the record of these checks for a year.

The number of jars you need to check will vary with the size of the batch. For guidance, it is likely to be sufficient to check 3 out of batches of 50 jars or less, 5 out of batches between 50 and 100, and 7 or 8 for batches of over 100.

### **Nutrition labelling**

There seems to be some confusion amongst packers as to whether or not this is required. Nutrition labelling is optional unless a claim is made, e.g. "this honey is high in energy". In this case, a nutrition statement must be on the labelling and should include, as a minimum, the amount of energy, protein, carbohydrate and fat in 100g of the honey. This can be calculated using analysis or using tables, but it maybe simpler not to make a claim in the first place.

### **Organic claims**

If you are marketing your honey as organic, please see our specific leaflet 'A guide for Producers, Processors & Packers of Organic Products' which explains the extra legal controls which apply.

### **Voluntary labelling**

The British Importers and Packers Association (BHIPA) adhere to a voluntary labelling code whereby all honey on retail sale includes a warning statement that "honey should not be given to infants under 12 months of age." This is a precautionary measure against possible infant botulism which could potentially arise from the presence of Clostridium Botulinum spores in honey. Although this is not a statutory requirement, the Trading Standards Service supports this voluntary warning for infants under twelve months.

### **What are the consequences of non-compliance?**

**Failure to comply with these requirements is a criminal offence.**

**The maximum penalty on conviction is a fine of £5,000.**

This leaflet is not an authoritative interpretation of the law and is intended only for guidance. For further information, please contact your local Trading Standards Service.

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This leaflet is relevant for the following nations only:

- England
- Wales
- Northern Ireland