

ENHANCING THE SAFETY OF LOCALLY PREPARED FOODS



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What do I need to know to sell HONEY at the farmers market?

What is honey?

Honey is a naturally sweet and viscous food created by honeybees. The flavor of honey is created either naturally from the plants where bees harvest their nectar or through added flavorings. Some varieties of honey include:

- ▶ Tupelo honey.
- ▶ Orange blossom honey.
- ▶ Lavender honey.



Figure 1. There are many different types of honey; honey will appear differently depending on its variety and processing. (Photo courtesy of Pixabay Creative Common License.)

Why produce honey?

Honey is a natural sweetener and can be a value-added product.

Does the honey I produce require state inspection?

It depends on where your honey comes from and how much you produce. You can sell honey without a state inspection if (1) you produce AND process less than 250 gallons per year of pure honey

from your own personal hives at your private residence AND (2) you do not produce other food products that require inspection (VDACS 2017).

State inspection is required if you (1) produce more than 250 gallons of honey per year, (2) produce a value-added honey product, and/or (3) produce other foods requiring inspection (VDACS 2017).

What is pure honey?

Pure honey is honey that has not been altered. If you wish to sell honey with added flavors or ingredients, the product becomes a value-added product and is considered an infused honey. If you sell infused honey, your process and product require inspection and may need process validation and product testing to determine safety.

What is raw honey?

Raw honey is pure honey that has not been heat-processed. Raw honey maintains its original content from the combs (it might still contain pollen, bee parts, honeycomb, and royal jelly). Raw honey is exempt from inspection.



Figure 2. Honey is a natural sweetener than can also be added to various types of foods. (Photo available at pxhere.com; CC0 public domain.)

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Figure 3. Raw honey being filtered to get rid of bee parts. (Photo by Lily Yang)

What steps do I follow to sell my honey under the retail sales exemption?

There are no restrictions for where the honey is sold if you meet the criteria for the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) exemption (2017). The product must be labeled, verbatim: "PROCESSED AND PREPARED WITHOUT STATE INSPECTION. WARNING: Do not feed honey to infants under one year old." In addition to this statement, your label must also meet standard labeling information.

What steps do I follow if I produce honey (or infused honey) under inspection?

1. Decide where you will produce your product.
 - Out of your inspected home kitchen?
 - Out of an inspected community or commercial kitchen?
2. Become familiar with the regulatory process of starting a food business. Refer to VDACS' webpage, Home and Commercial Kitchen-Based Businesses, for more information.

3. Complete and submit the correct application that pertains to where you will be producing your honey. Use either the Application for Home Food Processing Operation or the Application for a Commercial Kitchen Food Processing Operation. Applications and further instructions can be found on VDACS' webpage, Home and Commercial Kitchen-Based Businesses.
4. After you submit your application, VDACS will review it for completeness and will contact you with further questions and/or to schedule an inspection.
5. Infused honey products require testing to determine safety and processing parameters. (Depending on the ingredients added, there could be potential risks involved with infusing honey that must be considered. To ensure the safety of your product, please have your process evaluated and your product tested.)

Where can I get my process evaluated and my product tested?

Product testing and process evaluation can be done through a process authority, food scientist, or food testing laboratory. You can find a process authority through the Association of Food and Drug Officials ([AFDO](http://AFDO.org); www.afdo.org/foodprocessing).

What are some guidelines for producing honey safely?

- ▶ Use proper cleaning and sanitation practices.
- ▶ Practice proper personal hygiene, including hand-washing.
- ▶ Wear food-safe gloves during handling, preparation, filling, and packaging of the honey.
- ▶ Use clean containers (glass or plastic) for packaging. Always cover stored, unused containers to keep them clean.
- ▶ If infusing honey, make sure your ingredients come from approved, reputable suppliers.

What are the requirements for my label?

Regardless of whether you sell your produce with or without inspection, the product should be clearly labeled and the label should include:

- ▶ Product identity.
- ▶ Net weight in U.S. standard weight units and metric units.
- ▶ Ingredients (by descending weight).
- ▶ List of allergens.
- ▶ Name and address of manufacturer.
- ▶ Statement (verbatim): "WARNING: Do Not Feed Honey to Infants Under One Year Old."
- ▶ Nutritional information, if relevant.

References

VDACS (Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Sciences). 2017. Handbook for Small Food Manufacturers. www.vdacs.virginia.gov/pdf/va-food-handbook.pdf.