

Honey Marketing and Production Tips

Jerry Logan, Honey Hill Farm, Edmond, OK

I started keeping bees about 1970 with five hives. My sales were to friends and at work. Soon I increased to ten hives, then twenty. At that time, I started looking at how to expand my market. A local health food store in Edmond became my first customer twenty-seven years ago.

As my market expanded, I had to increase the number of hives. I made the decision that once a new store or market was added, I would be able to supply them with honey year-round. I hoped I could produce enough honey to do this, so I worked even harder to keep my bees healthy and on good locations. As my honey production increased, I added more markets. I have purchased honey from other beekeepers who had a surplus and who were not able (because of time restraints or for health reasons) to market their honey. My customers want local honey, not honey from other states or foreign countries. Believe me, local honey will sell!

Potential Markets

- Health food stores
- Gift shops
- Farmers' markets
- Restaurants
- From the farm
- From your place of work
- Grocery stores
- Craft shows
- Other beekeepers

Planning the Size of the Business

Think small and build up. Start with ten to fifteen hives that can be split each year, increasing your production without having to buy new bees. The particular market you choose will determine the number of hives you will want. A hive will produce from four to five gallons of honey per season. Some will do better, some not as well.

When I started selling my honey off-premises, my processing facility (honey house) then had to be inspected by the county/state health department. Basic requirements are a floor drain, concrete floor, three-compartment sink, hand-washing sink, mop sink, and a paper towel holder.

Time Required

The time required to keep bees depends on the number of hives you have to work and where you locate your hives. I have hives in a thirty-mile radius of my home in six locations. Next spring I will add another location. In Oklahoma, bees produce honey between February 15 and October 1.

During the other months, I make new hives and frames, repair worn-out hives, and add additional hives. I also cook sugar patties for winter feeding. Starting in February, hives are checked about every twenty days. In mid-March this changes to every two weeks. From April through July, hives must be checked every seven to ten days. April is the month to split the hives and order queens. Splitting hives enables me to use my own bees to start new hives. By the end of July, the honey is usually ready to be pulled.

County Extension agencies can direct a potential beekeeper to a local beekeepers' club in your area. Oklahoma

About Jerry Logan and his Apiary

Jerry Logan's bee keeping operation is over 35 years old, with the apiary having around 100 hives located at the farm, in Edmond, and in south Oklahoma City. Some hives are in permanent locations and some are on gooseneck trailers for easy transportation. A honeybee exhibit used for showing tour groups how bees are kept is set up in one of the farm's barns. Honey is extracted and bottled in his state inspected "Honey House" in Edmond. Logan does all the work required to maintain his hives, and he markets his honey to local stores, restaurants, and two farmers' markets. Jerry is a mem-

ber of the Frontier Bee Keepers Club and has spoken at the Oklahoma State Bee Keepers Association meeting, at Langston University, and at a variety of other area meetings.

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has a state Beekeepers Association that meets once a year and publishes a newsletter. Great friendships are formed through these clubs, and members are always available to answer questions and give help. Visiting other bee yards is another activity of interest and help. Two journals I have subscribed to for years and years are *The American Bee Journal* and *Bee Culture*. There are about a dozen good bee supply companies in the U.S. offering nice catalogs. Examples are: *American Bee Journal*, www.dadant.com, *Bee Culture*, www.BeeCulture.com

Equipment

It isn't necessary to start with all new equipment. Used equipment and established hives are a good and economical way to begin. Some may want to build their own hives.

You will need:

20 frame extractor	\$1,133
One or two holding tanks	\$315 each
Water jacketed clarifier	\$860
Electric knife	\$75
Decapping tank	\$300
2-hive body hive	\$75-\$100
4 supers per hive	\$40-\$80
Building (honey house)	15' x 30'
Concrete floor & floor drain	
3-compartment sink	
Hand-washing sink	
Bee suit	
Hat	
Gloves	
Smoker	
Hive towels	
Large plastic honey containers	
Honey jars	
Lids	
Labels	
Sales receipt books	