

Labelling of honey

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Note: although the United Kingdom has left the European Union, certain pieces of legislation (formally known as 'retained EU law') will still apply until such time as they are replaced by new UK legislation; this means that you will still see references to EU regulations in our guidance.

This guidance is for England and Wales

Prepacked honey must be labelled with its name, the name and address of the producer / packer, country of origin, storage conditions, a best-before date, lot mark, and weight marking. The product may only be called 'honey' if it complies with the prescribed compositional standards.

This advice applies to all sales of honey to consumers and food businesses.

General labelling information

Honey that is prepacked should be labelled with the following:

- the name
- the name or trade name and address of the producer or responsible food business operator
- the country or countries of origin
- any special storage conditions
- a best-before date
- a lot mark
- the weight

Name

'Honey' means the natural sweet substance produced by bees from the nectar or secretions of plants, or the excretions of plant-sucking insects, and stored in honeycombs to ripen and mature.

You must label the product with the name 'honey' and you can only do so if the product meets the above definition; any product that does not meet the definition cannot be described as 'honey'.

If any additive or ingredient has been added to the product it cannot be called 'honey'.

The following reserved descriptions may also be used where the product meets the definition:

- blossom / nectar honey (made from the nectar of plants)
- honeydew honey (mainly made from the excretions of plant sucking insects and/or the secretions of plants)
- comb honey (stored by bees in the cells of honey combs and sold in the whole comb or part of it)
- chunk honey / cut comb in honey (contains one or more pieces of comb honey)
- drained honey (obtained from honeycombs by draining)
- extracted honey (obtained from honeycombs by centrifuge)
- pressed honey (obtained from honey combs by pressing, with or without heat of up to 45° C)
- filtered honey (honey that is highly filtered in a way that removes a significant amount of pollen)
- baker's honey (honey to be used as ingredients in other foods)

In the case of 'blossom honey', 'nectar honey', 'honeydew honey', 'drained honey', 'extracted honey' and 'pressed honey' the name can be either the appropriate reserved description or simply 'honey'.

Where the honey is produced primarily from pollen / secretions of a certain plant, the excretions of a certain insect, or entirely from within a certain geographical area, you may state this in the name of the product - for example, 'Lavender Honey', 'Aphid Honey', 'Sussex Honey', etc.

Additional clarifying words may be applied to the name - such as 'clear', 'natural', etc - provided they do not mislead.

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

Filtered honey will need to be labelled with a nutrition declaration for energy, fat, saturates, carbohydrate, sugars, protein and salt; unprocessed honey does not need to be labelled with a nutrition declaration.

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 labelled with the words 'Intended for cooking only' in close proximity to the name. When used as an ingredient in a food, it is permissible to use the abbreviated description 'honey' in the name of the food provided that the full reserved description of 'baker's honey' is listed in the ingredients.

Country or countries of origin

Honey must be labelled with the country or countries in which the honey was harvested, for example 'Origin: UK', 'Product of the UK', etc.

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 EU honeys'
- 'Blend of non-EU honeys'
- 'Blend of EU and non-EU honeys'

You must not refer to the UK as a Member State of the EU. Both 'Blend of non-EU honeys' and 'Blend of EU and non-EU honeys' may be used to refer to the UK (as appropriate).

If there is any reference to a particular plant or blossom (pictures or words), the honey must have come wholly or mainly from that blossom or plant - that is, the honey must be characterised by that blossom or plant.

If reference is made to a regional, territorial or topographical origin, the honey must come wholly from that country or place. For example, 'Mexican Honey' must come from Mexico and 'Essex Honey' must come from within the county of Essex.

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 and storage conditions

A durability indication in the form of a 'best before' date must be applied to prepacked honey. Honey that 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, such as 'Best before end Nov 2017'. However, in order to be able to identify a particular batch of honey (see below), you may wish to also include the day - for example, 'Best before 30 Nov 2017'.

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 - for example, this could be all the honey that is packed in one day. 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.

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 regardless so that 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 (sold from the premises on which it was packed or a mobile stall or vehicle used by the business), the labelling information may appear on a label, ticket or notice that can be clearly seen by the 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

Packed honey must show a metric weight marking, and may show an imperial weight mark in addition to the compulsory metric marking. The metric indication must be more prominent, and for most packs must be at least 4 mm high. The imperial marking must be no larger than the metric one. Note that the quantity shown should be the net weight - that is, the weight of the honey without the jar, lid and label.

The weight marking and name of the food should be shown in the same field of vision. There is a minimum font size of 1.2 mm for mandatory information. As letters of the alphabet are inevitably of different sizes, the 1.2 mm refers to the height of a lower case 'x' (usually an 8-point font).

Individual portions of 25 g or less are exempt from compulsory weight declarations.

Please see 'Packaged goods: average quantity' for more information.

Organic claims

If you are marketing your honey as organic, please see 'Labelling and describing organic food', which explains the extra legal controls that apply.

Trading standards

For more information on the work of trading standards services - and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law - please see 'Trading standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

Key legislation

Weights and Measures (Packaged Goods) Regulations 2006

Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 *on the provision of food information to consumers*

Food Information Regulations 2014

Food Information (Wales) Regulations 2014

Honey (England) Regulations 2015

Honey (Wales) Regulations 2015

Last reviewed / updated: March 2021

In this update

No major changes

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links may only show the original version of the legislation, although some amending legislation is linked to separately where it is directly related to the content of a guide. Information on amendments to legislation can be found on each link's 'More Resources' tab.

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