

Honey House Sanitation and the Florida Food Law¹

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Honey house sanitation should ever be on the mind of the honey processor. Even though extraction and bottling are often inherently messy affairs, they should not detract from presenting an aesthetically pleasing and healthful product to the consumer.

Unfortunately, honey house sanitation is sometimes low on a processor's priority list, especially in the last minute rush to get the product to market. Religiously adhering to a check off list, ensuring conditions at all times conform to those specified by law, is perhaps the best rule of thumb to follow when processing the crop both the beekeeper and bees worked so hard to make.

Florida law regulates honey house sanitation because packing and processing honey also comes under food processing. Specifics can be found in the Florida Food, Drug and Cosmetic Law, Chapter 55, Florida Statutes, 1979.

Florida Statute 500.12, Section 1(a) requires permits to manufacture, process or pack honey. Such permits are obtained by application and are issued annually on or before January 1. A fee is charged for the permit. Issuance of a permit provides access to the honey packing facility by food inspectors to ensure compliance with the permit's conditions.

The following regulations excerpted from ss 5E-6.08 of the above law govern the manufacture, processing or handling of honey.

(1)HONEY HOUSE. A honey house is any stationary or portable building, including equipment, used for the purpose of extracting, processing, packing or other handling of honey.

(2)FLOORS. Floors...shall be impervious and easily cleaned...smooth, in good repair, and kept clean...and if having a drain, be drained into septic tank, or cesspool, or be connected to local sewage disposal facilities.

(3)WALLS AND CEILINGS. Shall have smooth washable surfaces, be clean and in good repair.

(4)LIGHTING AND VENTILATION. Shall be adequately ventilated...permit efficient operations and cleaning of equipment.

(5)DOORS AND WINDOWS. Shall be screened, kept in good repair, and equipped with bee escapes.

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(6)WATER SUPPLY. Shall be properly located, constructed and operated in accordance with local sanitary codes...easily accessible...safe and sanitary.

(7)CONSTRUCTION, CARE, USE AND REPAIR OF HONEY HOUSE, CONTAINERS AND EQUIPMENT. During operation, the honey house shall be used exclusively for extraction, processing, packing or other handling of honey and for the storage of equipment related to the business of the honey house. Containers shall be free of internal rust, cleaned before reuse...all open equipment should be covered when not in use.

(8)WATER DISPOSAL. There shall be an efficient waste disposal system. Toilet facilities, including wash basins shall be conveniently available to honey house personnel. Toilet rooms shall not open directly into any room of the honey house. Toilets without plumbing shall be at least 75 feet from the plant...screened and have a self-closing door.

(9)STORAGE OF EQUIPMENT. Equipment shall be stored free from rust and contamination.

(10) HEATING EQUIPMENT. No boiler, oil stove or other heating equipment that gives off dust or odor may be used within the honey house, unless it has proper ventilation...and shall comply with fire regulations.

(11) WORKERS SANITATION. Workers shall wear clean and washable out clothing...keep hands clean, and be provided with clean and sanitary towels.

(12) CARE AND HANDLING OF COMBS AND HONEY. Combs should be loaded and handled so as to protect them from contamination.

(13) USE OF HONEY PUMPS. Before being pumped, honey shall be strained through a screen of at least eight meshes to the inch or pumped from a baffled sump tank which provides a constant supply of honey for the pump.

(14) CONTAINERS AND STORAGE. Honey shall not be packed in containers which have previously contained pesticide, creosote, gasoline, kerosine, fuel oil, paint, glue or other toxic substances. Storage tanks are to be protected from

contamination and packed honey shall be stored in a clean and sanitary manner.

(15) PESTICIDE PROHIBITED. The application of spray type pesticides in the honey house is prohibited during the extracting, processing and packing of honey.

Questions pertaining to the Florida honey house sanitation should be directed to Dr. John H. Rychener or Mr. Kevin Lufkin, Bureau of Food and Meat Inspection, Food Safety Division, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, 3125 Conner Blvd., Tallahassee, FL 32399-1650, Ph. 904/488-3951 or 1-800/HELPFLA, "select or say 6" for Food Safety.