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# JUDGING STANDARDS FOR APIARY PRODUCTS

Skagit ValleyBeekeepers Association  
Judging for Fairs

2025

SVBA Judging Committee

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## I. Terms Beekeepers Use When Talking About Honey

**Judging Rules and Requirements**-Always obtain a current copy of the judging rules and requirements for the competition you are entering. Items such as number of and container size, labeling requirements, required additional information (in the proper format) are only a few of the requirements that may vary from show to show.

**Beeswax** - A natural wax secreted by bee glands located on their abdomen. Beeswax can come in different degrees of color and cleanliness.

**Blended Honey** - A homogeneous mixture of two or more honeys differing in floral source, color, flavor, density or geographic origin.

**Chunk Comb** - Cut Comb Honey placed in a jar which is then filled with Extracted Honey.

**Crystallized Honey - (Creamed Honey)** Honey is a supersaturated solution of sugars and those sugars will form crystals; some honeys crystallize faster than others. Slow crystallization results in large, undesirable, crystals. Honey that is crystallized is not "spoiled" honey. Simply melt the crystals by gently warming the honey in a glass jar, not in a plastic honey bear, in a pan of warm water, loosening the cap (not above a temperature of 103 degrees).

**Cut Comb Honey**-Honey comb cut from a honeycomb frame by the beekeeper.

**Definition of Honey** - Honey is the substance made when the nectar and sweet deposits from plants are gathered, modified, and stored in the honeycomb by honey bees. The definition of honey stipulates a pure product that does not allow for the addition of any other substance. This includes, but is not limited to, water or other sweeteners.

**Extracted Honey** - Also known as strained honey, is liquid honey that has been separated from the comb by centrifugal force, gravity, straining, or other means. This honey is packaged in a bottle or larger container.

**Frame of Honey** - A frame of capped honey suitable for extracting. Frames can be of wood with any form of acceptable foundation, or made of one piece plastic. All size frames can be entered in this category.

**Floral** - Indicates the primary flowers from which bees gather nectar to produce the honey.

**Non-floral** -Indicates primary sources other than flowers such as extrafloral nectaries and honeydew.

**Geographic Origin** - The name of an area of production (state,region) may be included, provided the honey has been produced entirely within that area. Blends containing honey of foreign origin must be labeled to indicate their origin(s), in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR).

**Liquid Honey** - Liquid honey is honey that is free from visible crystals.

**Organic Honey** - Honey produced, processed, and packaged in accordance with State and Federal regulations on honey and organic products, and certified by a State Department of Agriculture or an independent organic farming certification organization.

**Pollen** - Loose pellets of plant pollen as gathered by bees, collected by the beekeeper, dried and cleaned.

**Propolis** - A gummy substance consisting of various plant resins and saps gathered by the bees that use it to seal cracks, line brood cells, and varnish the hive interior.

**Raw Honey** - Honey as it exists in the beehive or as obtained by extraction, settling, or straining without adding heat

**Weight to volume—**

16 oz glass Queenline style jar = 1 lb. liquid honey

12 oz. jar(1.5 pt) = 1 lb. creamed honey

**Award Point Ranges**

First Place (Blue Ribbon) 95 -100

Second Place (Red Ribbon) 90 - 94

Third Place (White Ribbon) 85 - 89

Participation (Pink Ribbon) Score at or below 84

**Containers**

Queenline Style jars in 16 oz., 1 pound size clear, glass jars. Jars must have white, metal lids. Clear, round wide mouth clear straight cylinder jars in 12 oz (1.5 pint) size.

## **II. Judging Class Description**

**1.Honey Extracting Frame:** A frame of capped honey suitable for extracting. Combs for extraction come in many sizes, so once again “check the schedule” to see which are allowed. The frame chosen to exhibit should be evenly drawn and well capped; it should be heavy for its size. The honey should all be of one color, with no sign of granulation and there should be no cells containing pollen or other debris. The capping should be clean and even, without dips and hollows, and clear of the woodwork so that uncapping would be an easy process. Travel staining and weeping will penalize the exhibit, and the presence of wax moth larvae will result in disqualification! When the frame has been chosen, it must be scraped clean of all dirt, propolis, etc. (do not forget the underside of the lugs) before being placed in the showcase. The frame should be covered in one layer of saran wrap on both sides or placed in a plexiglass or glass showcase. It should be easily opened allowing the judge to remove the frame for inspection.

**Note:** no specific “Top Bar” frame judging criteria has been specified. Judges will use honey extracting frame criteria where applicable for top bar frame Judging.

**2. Extracted Honey** - Also known as strained honey that has been separated from the comb by centrifugal force, gravity, straining, or other means. Entries consist of 2, 1 pound (16 oz.) glass Queenline style jars with white metal lids. Honey will be graded and judged on density, absence of crystals, cleanliness, flavor, aroma, fill, color, and container appearance.

**USDA Color Standards Color Range** (Pfund scale limits are given for all 7 ranges)

Water White.....Honey that is Water White or lighter in color (Pfund scale 8 or less)

Extra White..... Honey that is darker than Water White, but not darker than Extra White in Color(over 8-17)

White.....Honey that is darker than Extra White but not darker than White in color(over 17-34)

Extra Light Amber.. Honey that is darker than White, but not darker than Extra light Amber in color (34-50)

Light Amber.....Honey that is darker than Extra Light Amber, but not darker than light Amber in color(50-85)

Amber.....Honey that is darker than light Amber, but not darker than Amber in color (85-114)

Dark Amber.....Honey that is darker than Amber in color(over 114)

Show judging at times will combine the seven USDA colors into fewer judging classes. Our judging color classes are as follows:

**Class: Light** - Includes Water White, Extra White and White

**Class: Light Amber** -Includes Extra Light Amber, and Light Amber

**Class: Amber** - Amber

**Class: Dark** - Includes Dark Amber through black-I can't see through it!

Exhibitors may have assistance in selecting the appropriate color class for the extracted honey entries at check-in. When entering online, and unsure, wait until drop off.

**3. Cut and Chunk Comb Honey**-This entry comes in a square shaped comb, and should be displayed in containers that will allow judges to examine and taste one side while the other side can be kept intact for exhibit. Each entry consists of "two" "cassettes" (clear lids both sides, no pressure sensitive label). The foundation used is 100% beeswax with no metal wire supports in it.

### **Cut comb sections:**

This is bulk comb honey cut into pieces, edges drained, and suitably packaged for marketing. Entry is one piece placed in a commercial clamshell plastic comb honey box (4x4). The comb should be cut to exactly fit the container, using a template and a sharp knife, not a commercial comb cutter, and should be well drained on a rack (a cake cooling rack is suitable) before insertion. There should be no loose honey in the container when judging takes place. Never be tempted to 'make up the weight' with liquid indeed with another, thin piece of comb underneath, The latter would result in instant disqualification. The judge will remove the comb from the container to inspect the capping on both sides and if this is not possible due to loose honey in the container, the exhibit will be severely penalized. When two or more pieces of cut comb are required for a class, the rule of uniformity applies and they should match in every aspect. They should preferably be cut from the same comb, or at least from combs taken from the same super, and must be cut in the same direction, ie:tilt of cells. Two pieces of comb cut at right angles to one another will be severely penalized, however good they might be individually!

**4. Novelty Jar:** Novelty Jar entry is based on 50% jar, and 50% honey. Uniqueness of the jar is up to each person to enter, and may be any size over three inches high.

**5. Educational Display:** An educational exhibit shall serve to educate the public in some aspect of honeybees, beekeeping, or information of interest to beekeeping. Materials from any source may be used. The display must be the sole work of the exhibitor. (Youth division only)

### III. Judging Standards

(All attribute points add up to 100 for each judging standards)

#### 1. Judging Standards For: Honey Extracting Frames

Classes of Bulk Honey Frames are: 5  $\frac{3}{8}$ , 6  $\frac{1}{4}$ , 9  $\frac{1}{8}$ , and Heaviest Frame. (Any type of foundation can be used). Top Bar, Warre, or any other size frame entries will be judged using the following criteria where applicable.

Bulk Honey Frames are just that; a deep or shallow frame of fully capped honey directly from the hive. During the honey flow, the bees will draw out a deep or shallow frame of foundation extremely fast. They will fill and cap these frames quickly and leave behind a frame of honey capped fully with pure white wax. Over a period of time, the wax will turn yellow due to the bee traveling over the wax over and over again. It is important that the beekeeper remove the frame while the wax is still a pure white color. But the beekeeper must also make sure all the cells in the frame are fully filled and capped. So it takes a keen eye to tell when the frame is ready for exhibit. Each frame is then removed, cleaned, and stored in plastic wrap. It's important that the beekeeper does not touch the cells or damage the capping while removing, wrapping, and transporting to the honey show.

**Entry requirements - One Frame wrapped in "Only" one layer of saran wrap (separate glass enclosed display cases are also acceptable).**

#### ATTRIBUTE

#### POINTS (100 total)

##### Uniformity of appearance of honey and wax

**maximum points....20**

The first is uniformity of appearance. Does the honey and wax look uniformly distributed? You can usually tell this by looking at the cappings closely. Are there any ridges or raised areas? Points are taken off for areas of non-uniformity.

##### Absence of uncapped cells

**maximum points...20**

Comb honey should not contain any uncapped cells; it should be completely filled from top to bottom and side to side. In other words, there should be an absence of uncapped cells. Points are taken off for open cells.

##### Uniformity of color

**maximum points...15**

As stated before, comb honey should have pure white cappings, and there should be uniformity in color. If there are some that have yellow stains, points will be deducted.

##### Absence of watery cappings

**maximum points...10**

Sometimes the bees bring in nectar so fast that the honey does not have enough time to cure in the cell. In other words, the bees seal the honey in the cells before enough water has been evaporated from the honey. This results in watery cappings. The beekeeper needs to check the frame comb to make sure there aren't any of these watery cappings present in his or her exhibit. The judge can sometimes see these as little drops of honey seeping from some of the cells.

##### Cleanliness of the section of frame

**maximum points...15**

When the beekeeper removes the honeycomb frame from the hive, it should be cleaned. Some of the travel stains around the outside of the frame can be removed before presentation. Points will be taken off for any unremoved spots, discolorations, logos, symbols, initials, names, etc.

**Absence of granulation and pollen**

**maximum points...10**

A good exhibit of a drawn out honey frame will not contain any pollen or granulation due to crystallizations. Bees also deposit pollen in honeycomb; however, they usually do not deposit it in frames which are primarily used for honey since these frames are usually above and away from the brood chamber. However, there may be some bees who wish to deposit pollen even in honey supers. Also, sometimes honey will crystallize in the cells over a period of time and when temperature changes occur to promote this. The beekeeper should inspect his or her comb honey for both pollen and crystals in the cells.

**Uniformity in weight**

**maximum points...10**

The weight of the honeycomb frame must be uniform. One side of the comb cannot be filled with more honey than the other side. Also, if one side contains more uncured honey than the other side, this will cause a weight difference that can be felt by the judge.

**Heaviest frame class is judged on weight ONLY!** This frame is not restricted to an extracting frame, but must be full of honey.

## **2. Judging Standards for Extracted Honey**

Liquid Honey is put into a specified class simply by its color. The color of honey is totally dependent on the nectar gathered by the bees. Some flower nectar results in a very light honey almost as clear as water. Other nectar gives a very, very dark honey, almost so dark that you cannot see through it. Since this difference is a natural occurrence in nature, the judge does not take off points for color even if he preferred one color over the next. Color is the only criteria used to categorize samples into classes of honey. As liquid honey exhibits are entered, we compare them to the colors on a color grader chart to determine the class. Queenline clear glass style jars of liquid honey are accepted; any other container cannot be used. Clear glass Queenline jars work best for Polariscope examination during judging.

**Classes of Liquid Honey-**

MBBA has chosen to use the following four color classes for show entries.

**Class: Light** - Includes Water White, Extra White and White

**Class: Light Amber** -Includes Extra Light Amber, and Light Amber

**Class: Amber** - Amber

**Class: Dark** - Includes Dark Amber through black-I can't see through it!

Exhibitors may have assistance in selecting the appropriate color class for the extracted honey entries at check-in. When entering online, and unsure, wait until drop off.

**Entry requirements - Two (2) 16 oz. Queenline Glass Style clear jars, all of the same size.**

**ATTRIBUTE**

**POINTS(100 total)**

**Degree of Density**

**maximum points.....20**

Each sample of honey is checked for moisture content using a Refractometer. This device measures the specific gravity (or total solids content) of the honey using a metered prism. A drop of honey is placed on the refractometer prism and after providing light, the percentage of water in

the honey can be read off the chart seen through the opening. The full 20 points will be awarded to honey whose density is from 13.0 to 18.5. A honey sample containing more than 18.6% water content is disqualified. Honey containing that amount of water will ferment over a period of time. Honey content that is less than 13.0 will be checked carefully.

**Freedom from crystals, bubbles, and foam**

**maximum points...20**

The honey is then placed in a light box. This allows the judge to see very clearly every particle, crystals, bubbles, and foam in the honey as well as anything else that may be seen in the honey. This is why a glass Queenline jar is used because it allows a clear view of the contents. Sometimes entries which do not look crystalized just looking at them will still contain very fine crystals caused from sitting too long or temperature variations. Points are taken off if crystals are seen.

Foam sometimes settles at the top of the honey and must be removed by the beekeeper prior to entry. Usually you can tell when a honey sample has been just bottled for judging because the beekeeper did not give the honey time to settle out the bubbles and foam.

**Cleanliness of honey**

**maximum points...20**

The honey must also be clean, but can be compromised if there are pollen granules, wax particles, dirt, lint, bee parts or anything objectionable present in the honey. Never use cheese cloth (or similar material) to strain extracted honey through. It can/will impart lint particles into the extracted honey.

**Container appearance**

**maximum points.....20**

The containers must be glass Queenline style clear jars. They must be clean, neat, and uniform. Points are taken off if there are fingerprints, dirt, or anything objectionable on the outside of the containers. Those receiving the exhibits are very careful not to touch the glass jars with their fingers. Exhibits will be carefully handled and only when necessary, doing so by touching only the lids.

Uniformity of appearance of the honey is important. Sometimes a beekeeper will fill his or her 2 jars of honey from different batches of honey. Or they will start filling the jars from one batch and finish using another batch. Sometimes this causes one part of the honey to look darker or lighter or different in some way within the same jar or between the 2 jars.

**Flavor and Aroma**

**maximum points..20**

Flavor and aroma means the degree of tasted excellence and aroma for predominant floral sources. Points will not be deducted if one honey tastes different from another honey. Honey naturally takes on its flavor from the flower the nectar is gathered from, so different honeys in the same class will not always taste the same. What the judge looks for is any burnt or objectionable taste derived from the processing of honey or managing the bees. These objectionable flavors can be due to overheating the honey from which a burnt taste may be present. Other objectionable tastes can be detected from the overuse of substances which are absorbed by the honey, such as pesticides or the use of naphthalene instead of para-dichlorobenzene when storing supers. Para-dichlorobenzene is legal for use because it is not absorbed into the wax during storage of supers, whereas naphthalene is absorbed. Naphthalene is illegal and beekeepers should not use it. Sometimes the judge can pick up an unknown taste that he or she is fairly sure from experience does not naturally occur in honey. Menthol and other organic compound flavors will also be incorporated into the honey if applied to the hives when honey supers are present.



### 3. Judging Standards for : Cut Comb Honey

Comb Honey is the most natural form of honey. When the bees make honey, they store it in a beautiful, fresh, white wax which is built inside square plastic containers provided by the beekeeper in the hive. Comb honey is harvested just the way the bees have made it. No one has touched, filtered, melted, extracted, or processed the honey. Cut comb honey is similar in that it is also honey in the comb that has been cut out by the beekeeper in a square piece.

. This piece is then placed in appropriate containers. The foundation used in 100% beeswax with no metal wire supports in it.

#### **Classes of Comb Honey:**

##### **1. Comb Honey Box**

**Entry requirements - two sections of cut comb honey in the appropriate containers.**

#### **ATTRIBUTE**

#### **POINTS (100 total)**

##### **Uniformity of appearance of honey and wax** maximum points.....20

Does the honey and wax look uniformly distributed? You can usually tell this by looking at the cappings closely. Are there any ridges or raised areas? Points are taken off for areas of non-uniformity.

##### **Absence of uncapped cells** maximum points.....20

Comb honey should not contain any uncapped cells; it should be completely filled from top to bottom And side to side. There should be an absence of uncapped cells. Points are taken off for open cells.

##### **Uniformity of color of cappings** maximum points.....15

Comb honey should have pure white cappings and there should be uniformity in color. If there are some that have yellow travel stains, points will be deducted.

##### **Absence of watery cappings** maximum points.....10

Sometimes the bees bring in nectar so fast that the honey does not have enough time to cure in the cell. In other words, the bees seal the honey in the cells before enough water has been desiccated from the honey. This results in watery cappings. The beekeeper needs to check the comb honey to make sure there aren't any of these watery cappings present in his or her exhibit. The judge can sometimes see these as little drops of honey seeping from some of the cells.

##### **Uniformity of cut for 4 parallel-sides** maximum points.....15

When the beekeeper removes comb honey from the hive, it should be cleaned. Some of the travel stains around the outside of the frames can be removed before presentation. Points will be taken off for any unremoved spots or discolorations. Neatness and uniformity of cut are evaluated. The judge will downgrade for crushed comb.

##### **Absence of pollen and granulation** maximum points.....10

Bees also deposit pollen in honeycomb; however, they usually do not deposit it in frames which are primarily used for honey since these frames are usually above and away from the brood chamber. However, there may be some bees who wish to deposit pollen even in honey supers. Also, sometimes honey will crystalize in the cells over a period of time and when temperature changes occur to promote this. The beekeeper should inspect his or her comb honey for both pollen and crystals in the cells. Comb honey should not contain any pollen or granulation due to crystallization.

**Uniformity in weight**

maximum points.....10

The weight of the comb honey must be uniform. One side of the comb cannot be filled with more honey than the other side. Also, if one side contains more uncured honey than the other side, this will cause a weight difference that can be felt by the judge.

**7. Judging Standards for Novelty Honey Jar**

Entries for this division may be any family appropriate glass jar container used to hold your honey entry. The jar must be sealed, (not with tape or cellophane). Minimum height for the container is three inches. Fifty percent of scoring is for honey, and fifty percent is for the uniqueness and design of your novelty jar.

**Entry Requirements: Any one novelty jar constitutes an entry****ATTRIBUTE****POINTS (100 total)****Uniqueness of Jar**

maximum points.....50

Judges are looking for something that would have no equal, it is uncommon, and typically not ordinarily seen..

The criteria for judging honey are the same that has been previously mentioned for other attributes of honey so they are only mentioned here:

**Honey Fill ie: bubbles, foam, particles, crystals**

maximum points.....20

**Aroma and Flavor**

maximum points.....20

**Container appearance ie: cleanliness of jar**

maximum points.....10

**8. Judging Standards for Educational Poster (youth division only)**

Each exhibit is judged separately stressing the overall quality of the exhibit. Points are given for both the educational value and the quality of art. The exhibit must be attractive. You can tell from each exhibit how much work went into it and how much care was involved in putting it together. These are taken under consideration when judging this category.

**Entry Requirements - One Display****ATTRIBUTE****POINTS (100 total)****Public Appeal**

maximum points.....20

**Attractiveness and professional appearance**

maximum points.....20

**Educational Value**

maximum points.....20

**Originality**

maximum points.....20

**Time and effort of the exhibitor**

maximum points.....20