

# Skagit Valley Beekeepers



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## A Golden Opportunity!

The next meeting will be **June 12th, 2014 at 7:00 PM** at the Skagit Farmers Supply CENEX Administration building, located at 1833 Park Avenue, Burlington WA. The speaker will be Clyde Caldwell and he will be talking about "Bee Math" and the Science of Bee Math.

## Things To Do This Month

- Seems like everything is early this year - by about 2 to 3 weeks early compared to 2013.
- The blackberries are blooming or will be so soon - it's time to think about putting your honey supers on. Maybe we'll talk about this at the meeting!
- Do you need to re-queen? It's easier to find queen for sale this time of year.
- Did you check your mite levels. Do a powdered sugar test to determine your mite levels. Visit <http://goo.gl/Jy7065> for an example on how to test for mites.
- Consider mite treatments if mites are high - each type of treatment is performed differently, so check the instructions! There are treatments that can be made with honey supers on but *most require that any honey supers be removed during and for a time after treatment.*

## Thanks Brad!

A special thank you to **Brad Raspet** for running down to Renton to pick up all those burlap coffee bags! Brad brought a pickup load of burlap bags and handed them out for free at our May meeting. Our smokers will be lit for the entire year - *or more!* Thank you!

## Labeling & Marketing Honey For Sale

Trust is an important thing and once broken, very hard to

repair. The news these last 12 months have been filled with stories of stuff being sold as honey but was not. Of adulterations of honey and of honey being sold as a product of the United States when it was not. We need to be solid trustworthy local beekeepers and bring our customers a trustworthy product.

## What is honey and what isn't?

The commonly accepted definition of honey is "*a thick, sweet, syrupy substance that bees make as food from the nectar of flowers and store in honeycombs.*" [FDA Draft Guidance]

Honey, is a single product ingredient should be labeled as *Honey* and as such it doesn't require an ingredient label.

Anything added to honey is not considered honey but is considered a different product and requires an ingredient label (with some exceptions) AND must be conspicuously marked as a blend or flavored or whatever the case may be.

For example if a product is honey mixed with corn syrup, it must be labeled as such, e.g.: "A Blend of Honey and Corn Syrup" with the predominate ingredient listed first.

One famous fried chicken fast food restaurant provides a "honey sauce", which is easily mistaken for honey but where High Fructose Corn Syrup is the main ingredient and honey is the third ingredient. Slightly deceptive if you ask me. We as local beekeepers need to avoid these deceptions.

If any flavoring has been added then it must say that it is flavored, e.g.: "Lemon Flavored Honey".

Failing to disclose any additions to a product is considered an adulteration or considered mislabeled.

## Labeling honey.

Washington State law required that all honey sold "shall be conspicuously marked with the **name and address** of

the producer or distributor, the **net weight of the honey**, [and] the **grade of the honey**" [RCW 69.28]. I looked and couldn't find any law that stated if the address could or could not be a Post Office box. I did find plenty of examples where a Post Office box was displayed on the label both large scale and small.

I couldn't find any specific information as to the size of the text, but the National Honey Board states that the text should be no smaller than 1/16th of an inch when measuring the lower case letter "o".

### **Grading your honey.**

Washington State follows the Federal USDA guidelines for grading honey. Most of us will be able to give our honey the highest grade and while grading honey is slightly subjective, the standard is well defined by the USDA. TO be labeled as Grade A, honey must conformed to the following:

- Water content: Must have 18.6% or less moisture content.
- Defects: practically free of defects, with practically no defects that affect appearance or edibility.
- Flavor & Aroma: Free from caramelization, smoke, fermentation, chemicals and other causes that affect flavor and aroma.
- Clarity: Clear but may contain air bubbles that do not materially affect the appearance. May contain trace of pollen grains or other finely divided particles in suspension that do not affect appearance.

If it conforms with the above criteria, our honey can be sold as "Grade A".

### **The color of your honey.**

The color of your honey may be added but is not required. The options for color are: *Water White, Extra White, White, Extra Light Amber, Light Amber, Amber, Dark Amber*. If added to your label, it must conform and agree with USDA standards (see the link for USDA Standards for Grading Honey).

### **Floral source of your honey.**

Most say you can add the floral source of your honey when one floral source is the dominant source. At the

same time, Washington law [RCW 69.28.120] states that *"Any honey which is a blend of two or more floral types of honey shall not be labeled as a honey product from any one particular floral source alone."* I'm no lawyer but I take that to mean that if my bees are primarily visiting one nectar source and as long as I don't mix it with honey from a different nectar source, I can label it with that nectar source. For example: "Blackberry Honey" - but if I mix my blackberry honey with my clover honey, then it can not be labeled as from one floral/nectar source and should just be labeled "Honey". If the bees are visiting multiple types of flowers or nectar sources, then it can be called "Wildflower Honey".

### **Marketing your honey.**

There isn't much to marketing honey. You and your product *must not* make any claims that you can't back up, especially on the label.

At the same time, you don't have to discredit what your customers think about what honey can be useful for because you don't know that it can not do as they say either.

Honey *is* a natural sweetener, an energy food, widely used for skin care, and often used as a cough suppressant [National Honey Board].

Using words like *"raw"*, *"natural"*, *"unadulterated"*, *"small batch"*, *"local"*, *"ultra-local"* all help sell your honey - as long as it is true!

There are a lot of consumers that don't trust what they are buying when it comes to honey, so it's important that we as local beekeepers be the good representatives of the honey market that the consumer can trust. To do so, we need to have a proper honey product and market and label it correctly according to law without any claims that can be proven untrue.

References:

Washington State Law: HONEY (69.28 RCW)  
<http://goo.gl/k070gy>

USDA Standards for Grading Honey (PDF)  
<http://goo.gl/3vVfp0>

FDA Proper Labeling of Honey (Draft)  
<http://goo.gl/sUGsXc>

A Marketing Guide for Beekeepers (PDF)  
<http://goo.gl/1AjKQt>

## Selling At Your Local Farmers Market

I enjoy going to the Farmers Market. To me, it's all about the fresh local produce, meats, dairy, and other food products -- like honey for instance. Before I had my own bees, I would buy my honey at the Farmers Market. Of course I would be out of it by mid-winter and end up buying what-ever-it-is honey from the local grocery store (Hey! I didn't know then that you could just go buy it



Lisa Phillips answering questions at Oak Harbor's Farmers Market

from a beekeeper anytime!).

I visited **Lisa Phillips** at the Oak Harbor Farmers Market and **Skye Laurel** at the Anacortes Farmers Market.

At each visit, there were lots of people at each of their booths asking many questions, sampling honey and of course, handing over cash for a nice jar of that golden delight.

Lisa Phillips was selling honey from different local beekeepers. She had a nice display of different types of bees, a few pounds of wax on a scale, and of course honey for sale. She also had a nice sampling section with all the shades of honey from an almost water white honey all the way over to some very dark honey, encouraging



Skye Laurel selling honey at the Anacortes Farmers Market

customers to sample each one (with a clean taster, of course).

Skye in Anacortes also had samples of **Bruce Bowen's** honey, along with jars in all sorts of sizes, including what looked like 2 gallon tubs of honey.

Both Lisa and Skye had nice set ups and were doing a good job representing the honey they were selling.

Later, I emailed Lisa to ask if there was anything that she might think that I should have in this article. Lisa replied with, *"I like to offer the table to small time beekeepers who want to sell just a few jars. It helps them make a bit of cash and I can offer something unique."*

*I enjoy talking bees and educating people that bees are still in trouble. I get asked the same questions repeatedly so if you work a market you have to be ready for that. I have actually gotten a few new beekeepers this way. I've met quite a few beekeepers from other parts of the country and several from other countries.*

*You also have to have patience with people who complain about prices and thinking they can get same thing in Wal-Mart for less. A market is another group of people to work with (like beekeepers) there are the easy people to deal with and the ones that just like to stir the pot. You have to come to the market and smile whether or not some other vendor is being a pill. If you don't truly enjoy it you should never sell at a market because no matter how much money you make it will never be enough."*

Besides Farmers Markets, Certified Naturally Grown provides a few ideas for other venues at which to sell your honey:

- Independent grocery stores
- Health Food Stores
- Garden Supply Centers
- Tourist attractions
- Gift shops
- Farm stands
- Bakers (who wants honey for baked goods)
- Farmers (who want to supplement their CSA baskets, host hives, and sell at tailgate markets)
- People who make gift baskets

For more marketing ideas visit the National Honey Board at: <http://www.honey.com> and Certified Naturally Grown's pamphlet called, *A Marketing Guide for Beekeepers* (PDF) at <http://goo.gl/1AjkQt> .

