

Resources for Those Interested in Becoming Commercial Beekeepers

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By the Washington State Beekeepers Association

Introduction: Most beekeepers start keeping honey bees as a hobby, but as the years go by some of them start wondering about expanding and actually making beekeeping a profession. WASBA gets multiple questions each year from people who are interested in exploring this topic. We have compiled some resources that may help make that decision. The resources are a select list attempting to present guidelines that are current and not specific to one state (except for the section on Washington state). This is not meant as an inclusive list and any suggestions for other resources that might be useful are welcome.

Getting Started as a Commercial Beekeeper

How to Start a Bee Farm Business (2025 Guide: 10 Steps + Free Business Plan)

<https://www.serif.ai/start-a-business/how-to-start-a-bee-farm-business-2025-guide-10-steps-free-business-plan>. One of many online companies offering step-by-step information on starting a beekeeping business. Search for others under the subject “Bee Farm.”

How to Start a Beekeeping Business. <https://truicbusinessideas.com/beekeeping> TRUiC. Provides step-by-step information on how to set up a business including forming an LLC and determining if the business is right for you. The pricing for beekeeping start up is a little out of date so costs may be higher.

In Business with Bees. <https://store.motherearthnews.com/products/in-business-with-bees> Kim Flottum. How to expand sell and market honey, bee products and services including writing a business plan, finding sources for funding, and finding customers.

Inventory & Financial Analysis Handbook. https://beekeepersguild.au/wp-content/eBooks/inventory%20workbook%2001.05.18-min_accessible1.pdf Mary Kate Wheeler, Cornell University. Dyce Lab for Honey Bee Studies, Beekeeper Tech Team. Although this is good guidance for the general practice of financial areas to record, it would be prudent to start with either an Excel spreadsheet (mainly good for projecting business in the business plan) or even better just start out with QuickBooks and upload all the expenses and revenues directly from the start. As one commercial beekeeper states it’s “Hard to catch up once you’ve fallen behind.”

Turning Your Beekeeping Hobby into a Business: The Basics of Building a Bee Business.

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2951858448241994> Travis Grout, Cornell University, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Beekeeper Tech Team, April 2020.

Commercial Beekeeping: A Field Guide. <https://www.dadant.com/catalog/commercial-beekeeping-a-field-guide-m02318> Bee Informed Partnership, working with successful commercial beekeepers produced a 269-page pocket guide. The field guide includes topics from growing your operation, what it takes to run a commercial beekeeping business, management practices, and common problems with solutions.

Large-Scale Beekeeping

Commercial Beekeeping: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1479952898932524/> A forum on beekeeping from a commercial point of view. Focus is on income production and cost/time efficiencies, pros/cons of certain practices, and other subjects more of concern to those making their primary income from bees.

A Guide for Honey Bee Colonies Entering California
<https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/plant/pe/InteriorExclusion/pdfs/BeeFlyer-HoneybeeShipmentsEnteringCA.pdf>
Helpful information for beekeepers trucking colonies to California for pollination services. In addition to the information here, Tim Hiatt, a commercial beekeeper in the state and a WASBA Board member has provided the following helpful practical details. “At the border, you stop at the agricultural inspection station. They look for imported red fire ants and small hive beetles, and for noxious weeds stuck to the pallets. They want to know whose bees they are and the unload destination. If they find something bad, they won't let you in. Depending on what they find, you might have to go unload, power wash the pallets, and reload. In states with high traffic to CA (ND/SD/MT/ID so far) CA border inspection people have travelled there to instruct local departments of agriculture on doing the border inspection themselves for pre-loading inspection. Doing that, you get a certificate that you give at the border and they let you go without waiting. Sometimes it gets warm down there, and trucks can wait an hour for an inspection.” “Also, whether SHB is an issue for your load depends on your destination. Northern California counties typically do not allow SHB on loads arriving in them because it is felt SHB would devastate the queen producers. Some of central and all of southern counties finally do have SHB so if they find them on your load destined for those, it's not a big deal. I'm pretty sure in reality the northern counties do have SHB, but they're trying to keep it down. More details at <https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/plant/pollinators/inspections.html>

Guide to Varroa Mite Controls for Commercial Beekeeping Operations.
https://honeybeehealthcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Commercial_Beekeeping_062121.pdf Published by the Honey Bee Health Coalition, June 1, 2021. Provides help for commercial beekeepers to evaluate a variety of Varroa control methods that can be integrated into a management plan to protect their bees and their business.

Washington State: The following resources are recommended for those intending on having a commercial operation in Washington State.

Apiary Registration <https://agr.wa.gov/services/licenses-permits-and-certificates/summary-descriptions/apiary-registration> This links to the requirement for hive registration in Washington state and has links to applicable state laws regulating beekeeping. All money collected helps fund research projects with the Washington State University and other entities.

Beekeepers Tax Guide <https://dor.wa.gov/education/industry-guides/beekeepers-tax-guide> Washington State Department of Revenue guidance on state laws affecting beekeepers.

Guidance for Industry: Proper Labeling of Honey and Honey Products, <https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/guidance-industry-proper-labeling-honey-and-honey-products> U.S. Food and Drug Administration, March 2018

Regulations for Specific Products: Selling Honey, https://cms.agr.wa.gov/WSDAKentico/Documents/DO/RM/RM/40_SellingHoney.pdf Washington State Department of Agriculture, 2017. It is recommended that contact be made with the person locally responsible for inspection to verify compliance.

Washington Food Processing Act <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=69.07> (RCW Chapter 69,07)

Washington Revised Code Title 17.24.011 Regulation of Plant, Plant Product, Bee Movement, and Genetically Engineered Organisms. <https://codes.findlaw.com/wa/title-17-weeds-rodents-and-pests/#!tid=NB901D6C09A6911DABE2EFA883A08D708> The purpose of RCW 17.24 is to provide a strong system for the exclusion of bee pests and diseases through regulation of movement and quarantines from infested areas.

Washington State Honey Act. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=69.28> (RCW Chapter 69.28 Honey)

WorkSource: This link is useful for commercial beekeepers looking to hire either permanent or seasonal help. <https://worksource.my.site.com/worksourcewa/job-search?>