

Why the Canadian Beekeepers' Practical Handbook to Bee Biosecurity and Food Safety is an important tool for all beekeepers

All beekeepers, regardless if they keep one colony or thousands, must work towards running operations which are bio secure and food safe. Maintaining a high standard of food safety and biosecurity is essential for protecting against the spread of disease and to uphold the reputation of Canadian honey. This is important for maintaining consumer trust here in Canada as well as opening new markets abroad which can lead to greater economic stability for beekeepers. All beekeepers are part of the industry and must help to safeguard it.

The responsibility of protecting the industry might seem scary but good record keeping is one of the best tools available to help preserve a high level of both food safety and biosecurity. The **Honey Bee Producer Guide to the National Bee Farm-Level Biosecurity Standard** (i.e. the Bee Biosecurity Standard), and the **Canadian Bee Industry Safety Quality Traceability Producer Manual - Good Production Practices** (i.e., CBISQT) are recent theoretical documents which are available to all beekeepers and provide information about what records are needed. They outline many of the regulations which must be followed; however, they can be difficult to use. The **Canadian Beekeepers' Practical Handbook to Bee Biosecurity and Food Safety** an integration of those more theoretical documents. It combines them into a single easy to use tool for all beekeepers.

The Handbook is mainly made up of recordkeeping templates, each of which is accompanied by an information page. The templates can be customized to meet the needs of a beekeeping operation, or can be used as a reference to make sure all the needed data is collected. They are broken down into the following categories: general records, bee records, facility records, honey records and inventory. Each information page includes the frequency of use, reasons for recording the information, references to CBISQT and the BeeBiosecurity standard and general comments. Beekeepers who already keep excellent records, have a high degree of food safety and biosecurity and follow all the required regulations may find the Handbook is most useful as a handy reference guide to CBSQT and the Bee Biosecurity Standard.

In addition to being useful to help beekeepers do their part in maintaining the reputation of the Canadian beekeeping industry, record keeping is a very valuable tool for the optimal functioning of any operation. Reasons for this include:

- Improved recordkeeping can help to maximize profits and reduce excess expenditures
- Records help seasonal staff to maintain a consistent high level of food safety and bee biosecurity
- Keeping track of what is happening within an operation helps beekeepers to understand and implement the needed protocols
- Communication. Keeping track of all aspects of a beekeeping operation will help facilitate communication with the provincial Apiarist, bee inspectors, CFIA, crop insurance and other beekeepers. If there is damage to a bee yard because of bears or vandalism, it is important that beekeepers have their information readily available to submit reports or claims.

The bottom line is that keeping records leads to better beekeeping, healthier bees, more honey being produced and therefore more money being made. As well, the resulting increased food safety and biosecurity will help to maintain the reputation of Canadian honey.

There have been a few updates to the Handbook since it was originally released. It is now available in three different versions to ensure that beekeepers across Canada are able to choose the format that suits them best. The abridged version is suitable for beginners and small scale producers who

produce honey for personal use. It has fewer templates and concentrates mainly on bee records and inventory. As beekeepers expand their operations and establish more permanent facilities they should incorporate the full version. That version is primarily for larger operators and commercial beekeepers. It includes information which is useful for honey exports to international markets. The full version is also available in French.

There are six general revisions to the original version are in the full version. They include:

- Honey export requirements needed for the CFIA Health certificate
- Inclusion of appropriate grade or standard information
- Inclusion of prescribed container information
- Inclusion of correct labelling information
- Health and safety requirements are further emphasized
- Added references to the Canadian Best Management for Honey Bee Health document
- A table outlining which templates provide needed information for honey export

If a beekeeper wants to expand into new international markets there are many forms to fill and much information which is required. Having good record keeping makes it much easier to sell honey to those markets. As long as the reputation of Canadian honey is maintained it is more likely for beekeepers to be able to break into new markets. If there are beekeepers who try to sell honey that does not meet the high standard of food safety then the image of the entire industry can be tarnished.

The entire Handbook, as well as individual templates, are available as free downloads on the CHC website.