

Selling MI Pure Honey and Maple Syrup – Safely!

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Producing and selling pure honey and maple syrup can provide revenue for individuals. The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) allows entrepreneurs to sell these products without a license, if they stay within the exemption guidelines.

Sales cap

Pure honey and maple syrup sales do not fall under the Michigan Cottage Food Law, but rather a separate exemption. Annual gross sales revenue for either product must be $\leq \$50,000$ (or $\leq \$75,000$ when 2 or more products are priced at $\geq \$250$)*.

The maximum sales can be met for each product separately: gross sales of \$50,000 in honey *and* \$50,000 in maple syrup. A license will be required if these limits are exceeded.

**The limits may be adjusted annually by MDARD for inflation beginning October 1, 2026, and by October each year afterward.*

Mode of selling

Honey and maple syrup can be sold directly to consumers or through a third party, as long as the third party is a licensed retailer. This means that you can sell your pure honey or maple syrup at a farmers' market or roadside stand, or through a licensed grocery store or other retail outlet.



(Photo credit: iStock Lobo)



(Photo credit: iStock Magone)

Labeling

Each honey or maple syrup product must be labeled. The label must be printed in at least 11-point type or handwritten about 1/8 inch tall and include:

- name of business or owner
- disclaimer phrase: "Processed in a facility not inspected by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development."
- standard of identity (i.e., *honey* or *maple syrup*, can be in the name of the product)
- complete name and address of the last person or organization who packaged the product (i.e., if the product was wholesaled and the retailer packaged it, they must put their own label on it)
- measurements of the product (excluding the packaging) with honey expressed in weight (oz/lb and g) and maple syrup expressed in volume (oz/ pint/quart and ml/L)

Take the Selling MI Pure Honey and Maple Syrup – Safely! class at

msu.edu/cottage_food_law/events.

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MI Maple Syrup

*Processed in a facility not inspected by the
Michigan Department of Agriculture &
Rural Development*

*Green A. White
123 Sugar Shack Lane
Maplepure, MI 82662*

Net Wt. 16 oz (1 pint, 472 ml)

Spartan Sweet Honey

*Processed in a facility not inspected by the
Michigan Department of Agriculture &
Rural Development*

*Green A. White
123 University Lane
E. Lansing, MI 48823*

*Ingredients: Honey
Net Wt. 12 oz (340 gm)*

Adding ingredients

Before you alter your pure honey or maple syrup, contact MDARD at 1-800-292-3939 to confirm that your ingredients are acceptable, safe, and legal. With added ingredients, the honey or maple syrup products then become considered part of Michigan Cottage Food Law. See MSU Extension's webpage for more information about this law: https://www.canr.msu.edu/cottage_food_law/index.

Samples

Samples must be pre-packaged. An individual label is not needed for each sample, but you must have properly labeled packages of your product on display when offering samples.

Food safety guidelines

The main causes of foodborne illness include poor personal hygiene, cross contamination, and improperly cleaned and sanitized equipment and utensils. Hazardous processing practices can lead to unsafe honey and maple syrup products, which affect your business reputation and can have a financial impact. While these unsafe practices can allow dangerous microorganisms to grow, they can each be prevented.

Producers – and everyone involved – must practice safe food handling when collecting, processing, and packing honey and syrup, whether they are

employees, volunteers, youth, or adults. **Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP)** is a system for ensuring that products are consistently produced and controlled according to quality standards. It is designed to minimize any risk of contamination or unsafe practices that can happen during production. GMP considerations for honey and maple syrup are detailed below.

Honey and maple syrup producers are expected to meet the requirements of the Michigan Food Law since these products are meant for human consumption (Food Law Act 92 of 2000, 289.4105 at https://www.michigan.gov/mdard/-/media/Project/Websites/mdard/documents/food-dairy/laws/mi_modified_2009_food_code.pdf).



(Photo credit: iStock Mehes)

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Safe food handling of honey and maple syrup include:

- **Practice good personal hygiene** through all steps of collecting, processing, packaging and selling.
 - ◇ Wash your hands for 20 seconds. Washing hands should happen anytime they are contaminated, not just before you set out to collect honey or sap. This includes working with unclean surfaces, trips to the bathroom (outhouse), petting animals, handling dirty equipment, phone use, and more. Use MSU Extension's handwashing video for training (<https://www.canr.msu.edu/videos/handwashing-1>) or follow the steps below:



(Photo credit: iStock Wackerhausen)

- ✓ wet hands with warm water
- ✓ apply soap and scrub for 10-15 seconds
- ✓ rinse
- ✓ air dry or use a disposable paper towel (not a dirty cloth)
- ◇ Wear clean clothing, including aprons.
- ◇ Do not work when sick.
- ◇ Contain hair and beards, and other potential physical contaminants (jewelry, fake lashes, hair beads, fingernails, etc.).
- ◇ Cover all wounds. Michigan Food Code states that wounds on hands or wrists should be covered with a band aid AND a food safe glove.
- **Cleaning and sanitizing:** All food contact surfaces (buckets, strainers, containers, etc.) should be cleaned and sanitized to reduce pathogens to

a safe level. Cleaning simply involves washing surfaces and containers with soap and water to remove most dirt and germs. Sanitizing involves using heat or chemicals to reduce the number of germs to levels which are considered safe. It is important to follow food safe guidelines because it can be easy to contaminate food surfaces with chemicals if they are not used correctly.

- **Sanitizing:**

- ◇ To sanitize with heat, you can follow the manufacturer's instructions of your dishwasher or also boil items in water for 10 minutes.
- ◇ Chemicals are commonly used for sanitizing because they are effective, easy to use and accessible. Chlorine bleach is one of these sanitizers, however too much bleach can be dangerous, and too little can be ineffective. Use 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon of regular strength chlorine bleach for each quart of water. Always use test strips purchased from a food service store to be sure the proper concentration is achieved (50–99 parts per million).
 - ✓ Sanitizer strength decreases over time. Each day, you should prepare a new batch of sanitizer solution to ensure effectiveness.
 - ✓ Use disinfecting bleach. Avoid splash-less or fragrance-added bleach, which are not safe for use on food contact surfaces.
 - ✓ Do not use disinfecting wipes on food contact surfaces; they are too strong and leave a residue that is not considered safe.
 - ✓ Learn more by downloading our Safe Sanitizing & Disinfecting Fact Sheet (<https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/safe-sanitizing-and-disinfecting>), or watch this video: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/videos/safe-sanitizing>

- **Steps to Clean and Sanitize**

- ◇ Clean off visible debris from the surface by washing with soap and water.
- ◇ Rinse with clean water to remove detergent (detergents can reduce the effectiveness of some sanitizers).

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- ◇ Apply the sanitizing solution to the entire area to be sanitized and leave on for the recommended contact time.
- ◇ Air dry or wipe with a clean, disposable cloth.



(Photo credit: iStock Jackson)

- **Facility Standards:** Honey and maple syrup processed in a facility not inspected by MDARD must meet basic processing requirements, as outlined in the Michigan Food Code.

- ◇ **Pest control:** Questions to ask yourself include: Are items protected from pests? Do you use chemicals to control pests in a safe and instructed manner?

- ◇ **Covered facility:** It is important to operate in a covered facility to prevent airborne droppings. This can be an indoor facility for honey or maple syrup or a covered outdoor facility for maple syrup.

- ◇ **Safe water:** This needs to be available for washing hands and necessary items. Safe water can be a portable system taken to the field as long as it includes:

- ✓ water container
- ✓ soap
- ✓ disposable towels
- ✓ garbage container

- ◇ **Restrooms:** These must be accessible, even in the field.

- **Equipment:** All equipment should be food grade, including machine lubricants and filtration materials. Do not repurpose buckets or other single use containers from paint, agricultural products, automobile, cottage cheese, etc. Filtration materials must all be food grade and can be stainless steel, nylon, cheesecloth, wool, cotton, and food grade paper. These materials can be purchased directly through maple syrup suppliers or food wholesale stores.

- ◇ Do not put frames from honey houses on the ground when collecting. Bacteria in the soil can contaminate the honey, including bacteria that produce the botulinum toxin.

- **Storing:** During processing or bottling it is important to store both honey and maple syrup in food grade containers which are stainless steel, glass, or plastic. Tin containers can be used for maple syrup but not for honey as it is acidic and can leach chemicals from the container.

- ◇ Maple syrup containers need a heat treatment to create an airtight seal because the moisture content is high enough that mold and bacterial growth can occur. A classic way to store maple syrup is in glass containers that enable the true color to come through and allows for grading the syrup which can assist in pricing. Store unopened maple syrup in the pantry, and then in the refrigerator once opened.

- ◇ Honey does not need to be heat sealed, but rather just stored in an airtight container that prevents air and moisture exchange as increased moisture can lead to bacterial growth or fermentation. Honey is shelf stable because of its low moisture content and does not require refrigeration.

In summary, to prepare safe honey and maple syrup products:

- Familiarize yourself with Michigan's honey and maple syrup exemptions found at michigan.gov/cottagefood.
- Practice good personal hygiene, even in the field.
- Clean and sanitize equipment, utensils, dishes, and food preparation surfaces.

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- Use food safe storage and equipment.
- Visit: **Selling Food in Michigan: Quick Reference Guide:**
 - ◇ <https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/honey-1>
 - ◇ https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/maple_syrup
- Attend a free online class with MSU Extension on **Selling MI Honey and Maple Syrup – Safely!** (https://www.canr.msu.edu/cottage_food_law/events)

Resources:

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