

# Guidance for the Sale of Honey Bee Nuclei

## A honey bee nucleus supplier following best practice should:

- Regularly check all stocks for signs of disease. All personnel involved in the production and distribution of nuclei should be competent in recognising bee diseases and pests and, if necessary, have attended a recognised practical bee diseases and pests identification training course. Pest and disease recognition information should be available to all staff for identification purposes.
- Report any statutory diseases or pests found in stocks held or sold immediately to the National Bee Unit (NBU). If a statutory disease or pest is suspected to be present in any stocks, no stocks on the premises may be moved or sold until they have been inspected by a NBU Bee Inspector. (Note: these are requirements of the Bee Diseases and Pests Control (England) Order 2006)
- Keep records of all sales of nuclei and the date of despatch. The records should include the purchaser's name and address and contact telephone number(s) and email (where possible). Under the 2006 Order – see previous bullet point - this information will need to be provided to the NBU if a statutory pest or disease is found on your premises to enable them to carry out follow up checks on the stocks sold.
- Provide a comprehensive care and development instruction sheet with all sales of nuclei. This must include details of any treatments (including for *Varroa*) that have been applied to the nuclei and the dates on which these were administered in line with statutory requirements under Veterinary Medicines legislation.
- Have a published customer conflict policy to cover any disputes with purchasers.
- Adhere to the guidelines **overleaf** on nucleus composition .

Sellers and buyers can learn more through the NBU's BeeBase website  
[www.nationalbeeunit.com](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com)



## Nucleus composition

A nucleus is a well balanced colony between 3-6 British Standard brood combs. It should have bees, food, brood, and a queen as described below. The total number of combs should be stated. For bees on other sizes of frames the buyer and seller should reach agreement. A nucleus should be in a position to expand as soon as purchased, without the risk of starvation. It is not just the number of bees, but the queen and the quantity and age of the brood that is important. The container should have adequate ventilation to allow for transportation.

**Combs and Frames.** The frames should be securely nailed/pinned and be in sound order. They need not be new but should have been thoroughly cleaned. Combs should be fully built out, i.e. not wax foundation. The outer combs can be food only, especially on the outside faces. There should be no sacrificial drone comb. Combs should be reasonably free of brace comb and the nuclei should be easy to remove from the container to ensure that the bees are not crushed in the process.

**Queen.** An established young mated laying queen should be present. She may be marked with the 'standard' colour for the year (although it may not be reliable to assume the colour marking will comply with the convention). If unclipped, her wings may be clipped at the request of the purchaser and with the agreement of the supplier. The queen may be transported caged (for safety and proof of delivery) for release at the destination by the beekeeper. In such cases, full instructions should be provided to assist this process to avoid losses. If requested, the supplier should be able to provide purchasers with records of the source of all queens.

**Brood.** At least 3 frames with brood should be present. Brood and eggs in all stages should occupy at least half the total comb area, with no brood cycle break. At least 30% of the total comb area should be sealed brood. No more than 15% of the total comb area should be drone brood. There should be no active queen cells at any stage of development.

**Food.** It must be accepted that the food requirements of a nucleus can vary considerably. A 3 frame nucleus will require the equivalent of 1 full comb of honey and a half frame of pollen as stores. A 6 frame nucleus will require 2 to 3 combs of honey and a whole frame of pollen.

**Adult Bees.** There should be a good balance of adult bees of different ages and 3-4 frames should be well covered. The bees should be good tempered when handled by a competent handler in suitable conditions. There may be a varying number of drones depending on the time of year.

**Health.** The brood should be healthy and not show any signs of disease in any stage, except that a small number of cells showing chalk brood is acceptable as this infection is so common in UK colonies. In the adult bees there should be no obvious signs of any disease (for example: acarine which can cause distinctive "K" wings or crawling bees; deformed wing virus which can cause damaged wings and is associated with heavy *Varroa* infestation; and, *Nosema* which can cause dysentery). No wax moth should be visible.

**Since bees are living things, it is acceptable for the composition of the nucleus to vary slightly from the description above due to the prevailing conditions and weather at the time of sale and the delivery arrangements. The supplier will be happy to discuss this further with the purchaser.**

### Don't put your bees at risk. Are you registered on BeeBase?

BeeBase is a FREE online service provided by the National Bee Unit (NBU) to help protect you and your fellow beekeepers from colony threatening pests and diseases.

If there is a disease outbreak in your area, the NBU team uses BeeBase to contact local beekeepers and arrange for precautionary inspections to check for any signs of infection, and to advise on what to do.

**Register today through one of these easy methods:**

**[www.nationalbeeunit.com](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com) t. 01904 462510**



This guidance was produced by Fera with beekeeping suppliers as part of the Healthy Bees Plan. The Healthy Bees Plan aims to address the challenges facing beekeepers in sustaining the health of honey bees and beekeeping in England and Wales. It has been jointly developed by Governments, beekeepers, their associations and other stakeholders.

For more information on the Healthy Bees Plan visit:

**<http://www.fera.defra.gov.uk/healthybeesplan>**



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