

# David Bock with Buzzed Honeys

**David Crabill:** Welcome to the Forrager Podcast, where I talk with cottage food entrepreneurs about their strategies for running a food business from home. I'm David Crabill and today I'm talking with David Bock. David lives in Altadena, California and sells honey with his cottage food business, Buzzed Honeys. As you'll hear in this episode, David has a very large email list for his honey business.

[00:00:24] He now has over 3, 500 email subscribers on his list, and a big chunk of his sales come from those subscribers. It just shows the power of having an email list for your business, and if you don't have one yet, you should do what David did. He watched my free email marketing tutorial and set up ConvertKit for his business, and now he has a solid email marketing system in place.

[00:00:48] If email marketing is at the bottom of your priority list right now, Hopefully this episode will inspire you to bring it to the top. To watch my tutorial you can go to [forrager.com/email](http://forrager.com/email). Now David was one of the very first people to sell honey under California's cottage food law.

[00:01:05] He's been running his business for over a decade now. And he now does beekeeping full time. In this episode, you'll hear how his previous career in showbiz inspired his jump into beekeeping. You'll also see that he is not your average beekeeper. He specializes in rescuing honeybees, he now manages 60 hives, and he helps others start their own hives as well. In short, he truly has a multifaceted business, so let's learn more about it and jump right into this episode.

[00:01:38] Welcome to the show, David. Nice to have you here.

[00:01:43] **David Bock:** Nice to be here. Thank you for inviting me.

[00:01:45] **David Crabill:** Well, David, I know you sell honey. Can you take me back to when you started this whole honey making journey?

[00:01:53] **David Bock:** Sure, I guess we got our first hives around 2013? And that was supposed to just be a hobby for my kids and me. We just got a couple of hives in the backyard. And it snowballed from there. the very first version of the business was just my kids who were, they were, seven and 10 that time.

[00:02:14] So we had our first couple of hives, which actually, they weren't even ours, a beekeeper. We met at a farmer's market, asked if he could put hives in our yard just to make urban honey for him to sell, and sounded like a good idea. So we tried that, and we had his hives for about a year he ended up moving his hives out, and then I got hives of my own, and that's how we got started in beekeeping.

[00:02:37] the business part of it was really an accident. My son just wanted to sell honey one day. To make money for video games and there's no reason not to do that. So he went out in our driveway and started selling and, sold out in a couple of hours. And then he said he wanted to do it again the next week.

[00:02:53] That's the origin of our business.

[00:02:55] **David Crabill:** know that beekeeping has become a passion of yours, but you also have a pretty unique career and what led you up into this? Can you share a little bit about that?

[00:03:06] **David Bock:** Oh yeah. Before this, I was writing a documentary TV shows. a lot of shows on the Discovery Channel and Animal Planet. Um a bunch of shows for Jack Hanna.

[00:03:18] um, saving a species. That was a series of specials. We did one about The Mountain Gorillas in Rwanda and Natalie Portman was the host. Food Network. I worked on Kid in a Candy store So a bunch of different TV projects. I did that for almost 20 years and I was still doing it. Up until COVID, but the way the bees fit into the, the TV writing was just before we met beekeeper who set us up with our first hives.

[00:03:48] I was just getting sick of staring at the computer all day. It was a lot of sitting there, especially working on wildlife documentaries. I would watch other people out in the world, usually exotic locations having fun, experiencing all kinds of great things while I was sitting at my computer writing about them. Which is not a bad job, but at a certain point I started feeling like, man, can't I leave my desk also? I'm allowed to go outside, aren't I? And so the beekeeping was a way of getting out of the house and doing something with wildlife that I could also contain in my own yard.

[00:04:23] I wouldn't have to, go to the other side of the world to interact with wildlife.

[00:04:26] **David Crabill:** but it sounds like it was kind of a total accident, right? Like were you seeking something outside or was just, you know, this, whatever happened where bumping into this beekeeper?

[00:04:38] **David Bock:** yeah, no, I wasn't looking for it, it was, just serendipity that my kids and I were at a farmer's market and there was this beekeeper selling his honey wearing the beekeeper suit and we just started chatting and he said he was looking for yards. And, I said, sure, bring some hives over.

[00:04:54] Nowadays, that's exactly the same thing I do. When I talk to people, I say, I'm looking for yards to put my hives in. when I get lucky, they say, come on over and bring your hive.

[00:05:03] **David Crabill:** Yeah. It's pretty kind of unique where it's not just that you're making honey, but you're actually helping rescue bees and relocating swarms. Can you describe a little bit about what makes your honey business particularly unique?

[00:05:19] **David Bock:** Sure, the business has several different sides to it. So we spend a lot of time doing bee removal. so in Los Angeles, of course, winter barely ever comes, right? warm virtually year round, and so the population is really big in L. A. County, and because of that, there is a Wild colonies are always swarming and they move in to all kinds of different spaces.

[00:05:46] Any, place there's an essentially an empty cavity, they'll move in. So compost bins are a favorite location for honeybees. And when the homeowner finds bees in their compost bin, they almost always want to get them removed. And so that's a source of a lot of work. And also a lot of bees. So both my kids still work in the business.

[00:06:04] My younger son does a lot of bee removals. My older son does practically all the honey processing and packing and filling jars and putting on the labels stuff like that. so the bee removal is, Another income stream, and it's also the source of our, you know, of our bees.

[00:06:20] **David Crabill:** And I see that you specifically focus on humane bee removal. What does that mean?

[00:06:26] **David Bock:** Right. So, that was just a way I, that I thought of describing what we do. It just basically means that when we arrive, we're not going to spray pesticide. Or exterminate them in any way we'll, we transfer

them from the compost bin into some kind of container. We have a low pressure vacuum that we use and sometimes we'll also just move it into another box.

[00:06:49] And then we take the bees away and transfer them again into one of our wooden hives.

[00:06:53] **David Crabill:** I do know you've got a lot of hives now. How many hives do you have?

[00:06:58] **David Bock:** I think we're up to around 60 hives right now. still not as what I want it, where I want to be. I was aiming for a hundred but we will get there by the end of this year

[00:07:08] **David Crabill:** And these aren't all on your property, right? You have them distributed in multiple locations?

[00:07:14] **David Bock:** Actually none are in my backyard because my neighbors asked me not to do that. so they are in nine different locations around L. A. County. Beverly Hills, Hollywood. Pasadena, Altadena, and some other neighborhoods, Mount Washington, Island Park.

[00:07:31] **David Crabill:** And how do you get access to these locations?

[00:07:34] **David Bock:** So that's been the, sort of, the biggest long term project. When we first started and just had a couple of hives, it was not a problem to keep them in the yard. And then as soon as we started doing removals, which happened like in the very first year, We started capturing swarms, we outgrew our own yard, right away.

[00:07:55] And so I just started asking everybody I knew if they had a, had space for beehives and used social media a little bit put a note on next door. And slowly over time people, would contact me and, offer their yard and I'd go check it out and some yards worked better than others.

[00:08:13] but so at this point we've got some really great locations. Usually people with a very big backyard or a second lot that's undeveloped. one location the owners bought the property and are still planning what they want to build there. So that's a, like a double lot in Hollywood and it's, totally undeveloped.

[00:08:33] The owner just lets me use it for bees. So it took a lot of luck and a lot of asking people, if they had room for hives.

[00:08:40] **David Crabill:** I'm also thinking about just like, The amount of work it takes because you've got to travel around to maintain these bees like how much of your time is actually spent Just driving to the separate hives and taking care of them I I can't remember exactly how much maintenance a beehive requires

[00:08:59] **David Bock:** Yeah, I visit every two or three weeks. And so, several of the yards are very close to where I live, and then the others are maybe under half an hour drive. It's only the Beverly Hills yard that's about an hour each way. But otherwise I've kept them roughly in my area.

[00:09:15] **David Crabill:** So it sounds like not too bad in terms of the amount of time you're spending maintaining them

[00:09:21] **David Bock:** No, much less of a commute than most people have, if they work. At an office, almost everyone in L. A. would drive more than half an hour, to get to work.

[00:09:30] **David Crabill:** now. I know I know that bees have just been a big issue in the last 10 years in terms of the populations of bees and risk of, I don't know if it's pesticides or whatever, but I just know there's been a lot of movement in trying to increase bee populations. Was that part of what drives you in this work?

[00:09:50] **David Bock:** Mmm, I, I mean, the Colony Collapse Disorder was a big story several years ago, and I did know about it, but that wasn't one of my big motivations. And that's a whole, that's a whole topic in and of itself, the threat to honeybees. But the summary of that whole issue is there are a lot of honeybees all over and they're doing pretty well.

[00:10:13] And so honeybees aren't actually a threatened species. It's some of those native bees is a different story, but I don't work with them. And, I'm not a researcher. So, I can't really speak about that knowledgeably. there are definitely some bee species that are threatened. And honeybees are not one of those. there are lots of challenges in keeping healthy hives of honeybees. So, they're not a threatened species, but you do have to take a lot of steps to keep the hives healthy. Because of mostly the parasite, the varroa mite.

[00:10:45] **David Crabill:** Well, I know that this is a very multifaceted business. Obviously, you sell honey. Obviously, you relocate hives. Or swarms, but you also have a separate business. I guess it's kind of part of the same thing,

but it has a different name, I think, where you actually help other people start hives, right? So you teach them how to do all the tricks and everything.

[00:11:08] **David Bock:** yeah. So, that was something I started a couple of years ago. People often wanted to buy beehives from me and I was doing that for a while, but, very often those people, I would check in with them after a few months and the bees had died or You know, they had to move and they couldn't keep the hives or someone in the house got stung and they had a bad reaction and they want to get rid of the bees.

[00:11:29] So, it's pretty expensive, to get started. Especially when you buy all the tools, and the suits, and the hives themselves, and then you need stand to put the hives on, and there's a whole bunch of stuff. So, what I started doing, instead of just selling hives to new beekeepers, I offered to rent them the hives for a few months, and I would, part of the rental fee included me, or one of my One of my employees, and so we would go over and do the beekeeping for them.

[00:11:55] know, we'd visit every two weeks and some people wanted to be there and learn the process with us and some people just wanted to have bees in their yard and keep the honey. so that is another aspect of the business. Yeah, and I call that part bees a million. Bees a million, is everything except honey.

[00:12:12] So the bee removal and the rental and also there's another side of that, which is some businesses sponsor hives. So when businesses sponsor hives, they pay a monthly fee. Their hives live in our bee yards, but they get the honey and they can come and visit the hives and take pictures and videos and stuff and use that as part of their corporate branding. and that has sort of come and gone over the years, but this this year we have a few more people interested and I'm trying to build that part of the business more because, you know, obviously it would be a significant income streams for me and it, And it provides the benefit for the businesses too as far as their own promotion and, and also keeping their employees engaged because their own employees, you know, can schedule a visit to see their hives and also follow along by, watching the videos or seeing the pictures of their hives and what they're doing.

[00:13:05] **David Crabill:** I'm just thinking about somebody who's starting or wants to start a honey business and you said that it was expensive to get started and let's just say they don't live in Los Angeles and they can't hire bees a million to help them how much of an investment are we talking and, and what should people know when they're getting started?

[00:13:25] **David Bock:** Well, if you buy all this stuff new, you know, unless you know someone who has hives already, you probably would spend about a thousand dollars to get started. Some people want to do it that way, but most people get a hive for reason, or, you know, maybe they get it as a present, or maybe they get it sort of on a whim, and then they don't realize all the other stuff that they'll need make it happen.

[00:13:48] So, that's another reason I started renting hives, because people would call and say, hey, I got this beehive, do you want to come over and show me how to set it up? And I would say, sure, well, do you have your beekeeper suit already? And they'd say, oh, no. You have the smoker already. No, no, no, we didn't get any of that.

[00:14:03] We just have this And then once I would start telling them all the other stuff they needed, they sometimes would say, Oh, okay, no, I'm not going to do that. But yeah, the short answer is around \$1,000 to get started.

[00:14:13] **David Crabill:** From some of the pictures I saw, it looks like you don't even wear a beekeeper suit anymore. Is that right?

[00:14:20] **David Bock:** Uh, let's see.

[00:14:22] **David Crabill:** I'm specifically thinking about the Thanksgiving swarm, which was a crazy video.

[00:14:27] **David Bock:** oh, right. Well, so swarms are sort of a difference. I don't know how much bee biology you want to hear. But when a swarm is arriving, it is generally very difficult to get stung by those bees and that's because well you saw the video on Thanksgiving, so it looks like a bunch of bees flying around and then they slowly coalesce and land.

[00:14:50] They pick a spot to land and they, then they're just sort of a ball all clinging to each other. And when they're doing that, the bees that are in the swarm just, they've left their, the mother colony and the old queen has taken off. She abandoned her old home with about half the bees in the colony, and they're off looking for a new place to live.

[00:15:12] The reason they do that is because it got overcrowded. in the original colony, in the original hive, they just ran outta room. And so the queen leaves to make room for one of her daughters who she leaves behind, and the daughter will become the new queen of that old colony. So the swarm is out looking for a

place to live, but just before those bees leave their original home, they fill up with honey.

[00:15:38] Because when they get to the new place, obviously there won't be any honey there, and so they need that for energy, and to feed each other, and to have energy to start producing the wax comb that they'll need for the new hive location, and so that's why when a swarm arrives I can walk right out into the middle of it, and not

[00:15:56] com. Not worry about getting stung because the bees are so full of honey that they actually have a hard time curling their body around and that's how she gets her body in position to sting you So when she's full of honey, her body is straight and she can't curl it around in that way. So physically they, they have a very hard time stinging.

[00:16:17] And they're also not oriented. Yeah, they're, they're not trying to, you know, bees will sting because they feel threatened. So a bee sting is really a, it, even though it feels aggressive if, if bees are, trying to sting you, but really it's a defense mechanism. And so. if you want to get stung, a good way is to walk up to a beehive and stick your face right into the entrance and look in there and say something like, Hey, are there really bees living here, which this happens more often than you might think.

[00:16:44] And then they'll come out, you know, they'll smell your breath. They don't like mammal breaths very much. It's one of their triggers, in fact. So, if you're near a hive And you put your face close to the entrance or even if you, you know, there's a tree and you see bees flying around and then you notice the hole where they're going in and out.

[00:17:02] This happens all the time in the parks around Los Angeles. So people will walk right up to the tree and look in. And say, hey, I think there are bees living in here, and that's the exact wrong thing to do, because you know, as you talk, your breath is obviously, you know, reaching the entrance of the hive, and that will activate the bees, the guard bees will come out to, defend the hive by stinging.

[00:17:23] **David Crabill:** Well, that is all fascinating stuff. I didn't know any of that. So that, that is really cool to hear. Obviously, you, you have a ton of hives, a ton of bees, and you make a lot of honey, and you sell a lot of honey. I just am curious though, you know, I know you're, you're past your main career. Is this, do you think of this as a hobby for yourself or do you really think of it as a business?



[00:17:49] **David Bock:** No, at this point, I do this full time. I do bees all day. and until COVID, you know, I was still writing TV shows, but then you know, things changed. I was on a show, Jack Hanna show, and that involved him doing a lot of traveling. And, a lot of overseas traveling, interacting with people, and also visiting wildlife parks.

[00:18:09] And, you know, when everything shut down, there was, there was no way for that show to continue. And so they took a break, and that was a good chance for me to think about what I wanted to do with my life. And I'd been leaning this way for a few years anyway. You know, I wanted to get more serious about the beekeeping and so that was, my chance to transition over to just bees and honey all the time.

[00:18:31] **David Crabill:** So I think you've been selling for over 10 years now. You started just after the cottage food law in California took place in 2013, right?

[00:18:42] **David Bock:** Yep, I learned about that from you.

[00:18:44] **David Crabill:** Oh, really? Okay, well I know it was an accident to learn about, beekeeping and it was kind of an accident to like, you know, have your son want to start selling and making some money and, learning about the cottage food law. But can you walk me through that, those first few years and what did that look like?

[00:19:03] Were you just selling from home? Were you actually going out to markets?

[00:19:07] **David Bock:** we had sales in front of the house pretty regularly. That was something my kids would do and, by total coincidence, right after we started, maybe six months or a year after we started, a company called Good Eggs came to Los Angeles and that was kind of like an online farmer's market that would also deliver. And so they were here for a few years, but they called us, I still, to be honest with you, I'm not 100 percent sure how they found us, because we barely had a website, but they called us up to see if they could distribute the honey, and that was the first real customer we had, and that's when they called, that's when I had to get serious and get the cottage food license and insurance and all that stuff, get the packaging better and, scale up, but uh, obviously produced in a home kitchen but it was so new at that time, the health inspector had never approved a honey business, and so that took, it took several months of them visiting and me trying to explain Things like so, we don't add anything to the honey.

[00:20:12] We, I sell, we have avocado honey we have, let's say, orange honey then we have honey from different neighborhoods, right? So, my label, when I started, my label design said raw avocado honey, and then they, the cottage food people, wrote back and said, no, if you have more than one ingredient, you have to have an ingredients panel.

[00:20:33] So that's a requirement of the label. And then I would write back, we don't have multiple ingredients. It's just raw avocado honey. Then they would write back, well, it's honey with avocados. That's ingredients. That's why your label isn't approved. And then I would write back, no. And the contents of the jar is just honey produced by bees that foraged on avocado trees.

[00:20:55] And then they would write back, what do you mean avocado trees? And then write back, so we like that on and on until I finally explained that different kinds of honey come from different floral sources. And if you have honey, that's almost, I think the rule is. 60 percent or something like that from one source, then you can call that honey avocado honey, orange honey, clover, and so on.

[00:21:19] **David Crabill:** That that's a hilarious know, usually it's the Ag department that approves honey businesses. And in fact, in in a lot of states it's still the Ag department and honey doesn't fall under the realm of the cottage food industry at all. So in California's kind of unique 'cause it does fall under the realm of cottage food.

[00:21:39] So I imagine the health. department wasn't used to dealing with any honey producers before this. So that, it kind of makes sense. I

[00:21:47] **David Bock:** I want to say that we were the very first cottage food business in Los Angeles, at least.

[00:21:54] **David Crabill:** mean, you started in 2013, you might've been the very first in the state.

[00:21:59] **David Bock:** maybe so. I mean, there are a lot of beekeepers in California, so I'm not sure about that, but I did see the list at one point.

[00:22:06] I'm pretty sure we were the only honey ones. Certainly based on, so was the health department we were working with. And they definitely did not have experience with honey. They also had a lot of questions like, well, what's your pasteurization process? No, I don't, I don't pasteurize with honey.

[00:22:23] Well, if you're selling a raw product then we don't know if we can approve you So , tThere was a lot of back and forth about if I'm selling a raw product out of my kitchen and it's not pasteurized, then how am I ensuring that it's a safe product? the Ag people never have that question, because they work with beekeepers all the time and who, sell at farmer's markets, but the health department was not used to that at all.

[00:22:45] Especially because they were also new to inspecting home kitchens. but, over time, like I say, it did take a while, but everyone eventually got on the same page. but that took a lot of explaining that, honey it's unique in lots of ways, would say the health risk of honey is feeding it to infants under the age of one. And that's because In raw honey there is a small amount, this is the way to sell a lot of honey, you ready? In raw honey, there can be a small amount of botulism.

[00:23:13] Such a vanishingly small amount that it wouldn't, body, an adult body would never notice it. But for very, very young kids, like I say, up to months at the age one their bodies can sometimes be affected. So I don't know of any cases of babies getting sick from honey, but supposedly that's a possibility, and I don't know if you'd call it a health risk, but we do have to put that on our, on our labels, you know, do not feed to.

[00:23:38] Infants under the age of one.

[00:23:40] **David Crabill:** you were working with the health department, you got your cottage food permit, but, the Ag Department usually manages all the other honey that's produced. Was there anything that you had to still go through them, like registering hives or anything like that?

[00:23:56] **David Bock:** I do in a way, yeah, I, so I register all the hives every year with the county. That's not related to the food part of the business, though. That's just hive registration. And that's actually a kind of a recent thing also, because when we started, beekeeping was not legal in Los Angeles. You could have hives and sort of be under the radar. And just not tell anybody about it, but if your neighbors got mad and called pest control, you know, called the city vector control, I think is the office that you would report to if they sent an inspector over, they could tell you you had to move the hives out of your yard.

[00:24:34] You couldn't have them. Then, thanks to a group called Honeylove, they. did a lot of work to work with the city council in LA to get beekeeping legalized. And so that happened maybe 2015 or 2016, something like that. So that happened right at the same time that we were getting started.

[00:24:53] And that helped a lot, of course, because that also got publicity for backyard beekeeping. And then people heard about it and they got more interested in hosting hives in their yards and, that all helped us grow.

[00:25:03] **David Crabill:** Now, I know when people get started with the honey business, one of the problems is that it can take a while to grow a hive and actually get enough honey that you, you have more than you even consume, right? You have enough to sell. So, but it sounds like you kind of skipped over that. You, you got a, a jumpstart or something, like you were selling honey pretty easily within the first year?

[00:25:29] **David Bock:** Well, let's see, in the first year, we had some honey from our own hives. we had some honey from bee removals, because sometimes we would, when we would remove a colony, not a swarm, but if, if a colony had gotten established somewhere in a wooden fence, for example, there are a lot of these senses, you know, the kind you just have, know, between your yard and your neighbors. And the way they're built, it's just a four by four with boards on either side. So there's a space in the middle, which is perfect for bees to move into. So when we did those fence jobs, depending on the, on the season, a lot of times there was a lot, quite a bit of extra honey there.

[00:26:05] And so we would save that and extract it. So that was a source of some honey. And then I knew other beekeepers and so I would get some honey from them. Once we started selling in retail stores, I met more beekeepers who specialized in certain kinds of honey, like avocado honey is a sort of a Southern California specialty.

[00:26:25] And yeah, our hives definitely didn't produce enough for us to expand the business. And so I started looking for specialty honey that would be something interesting to sell, something with a story behind it, and something that I really liked. And so, that led to, every time I visited an a family in Wisconsin, and also in the Portland area.

[00:26:48] And so when I went back to visit family I'd look around to see what the, what local specialty honey was available in Wisconsin and Oregon. And so one of, in Oregon, for example, one of the ones I found is called Meadowfoam, and I had never heard of that. And I tried it at a, at a farmer's market and got to know the beekeepers.

[00:27:08] And they told me, well, the reason you never heard of it is that the flower only grows. in the Willamette River Valley. And I said, that's it? That one place? I said, yeah, basically that that's where it grows, very, very far

Northern California. and I thought it, honey was great and it's very unusual because it smells like vanilla.

[00:27:26] I mean, a strong, scent of vanilla bean. So I got some of that and brought it back and sold it here. And everyone who, who tried it, was amazed, just had the same reaction that I did, that how come we never heard about this before, or thought it in stores, or just really never got exposed to it.

[00:27:42] And it's, the reason is, honey is so heavy, that if you're a beekeeper producing a lot of whatever kind of honey grows in your area it's a lot more efficient just to sell it close to home, and that's what happens with Meadow Foam in Oregon, they sell it all there, and there's no reason to try to find distribution outside of their area because shipping the honey, you know, adds so much cost to the product.

[00:28:03] And so, I just couldn't believe that that was how it was, but it's true. You can go to some specialty stores. And find honey from different places, but for example, even blackberry honey, which is super abundant in Washington state. Well, I had never heard of it or even tried it before.

[00:28:21] So that's another kind of honey that we got. You know, I got connected with the beekeeper in Washington and they produced just a really great tasting blackberry honey. And so we got that one and started bottling that as well.

[00:28:34] was the source of a lot of our honey in the period in the beginning before we had enough hives. And before I had learned enough to be good enough at beekeeping to produce an extra crop and enough, neighborhood honey for us to sell.

[00:28:48] **David Crabill:** actually have the opposite question too, which is now you've got 60 hives, you're producing a lot of honey, do you actually have more honey than you can sell now?

[00:29:02] **David Bock:** well, not more than we can sell, more than I have sold, though. And that's, on me. That's, as we've grown you know, like I said, my kids do a lot of work, but they're also, you know, they've been in school, of course, this whole time. The younger one is still finishing high school, and so I've hired extra people along the way.

[00:29:21] To help with different tasks. I have people bobbling students from Occidental College, because I used to live right near there, would come and

help bobble, and then I've hired assistant beekeepers, different people over the years but there's still a lot, to try to keep up with. And so, I divide my time, be keeping, servicing the clients who rent hives from us, and then doing honey processing and doing a lot of paperwork and, you know, all the business stuff.

[00:29:47] And so, at this point, right at this moment, we have a whole inventory, let's say around 1,000 jars maybe, 1, 200 jars. That are on our shelf that need to be sold. Now, when you ask, is it more than I can sell? Well, I need to sell, More honey, more quickly and so that's an ongoing part of the business. business, So the short answer would be, we never produce enough, because I always want to produce more honey. depending on how much work I'm putting into selling it, we have more or less honey in inventory of that.

[00:30:19] **David Crabill:** I feel like that's always a challenge with wearing so many hats and, you're also running multiple businesses, right? Cause you're, moving hives, you're helping other people, with their own hives.

[00:30:32] So, it's just difficult, right? Because You've got this inventory, but then you also have to put the effort and time into, to marketing it. Where do you currently sell your honey?

[00:30:42] **David Bock:** Yeah, so every week we set up a sale in the driveway. under a canopy, it looks like a farmer's market stand, and so we sell quite a bit that way. We just set up on Sundays. some odd Saturdays also, to Christmas especially, and so that's one way we sell direct to the public, and at the table, if you come to our honey stand, there is a sign up sheet where I try to get people to give me their email address. So then, I've got an email list, and I use that to promote our online store. is a pretty low key website but it people who are in our area order from us and then pick up their orders right at my front door. I just leave people's orders out for them on a little table that's in front of the door. That works better you might expect. Because so many people over the past few years, so many people have stopped at the honey stand that the list is maybe 3, contacts in that list, but almost all of them are people who have driven by my house at one point or another. So they're very, very local people, and so If they order on the website and I leave the honey out for them, they don't have to pay shipping and I don't have to go through the hassle of packing up and ordering.

[00:31:57] And so that's, you know, a secondary kind of direct to public sale. And then we're in about 15 retail stores that order not as much as I would like them to order, but they order, you know, regularly. And then I found another really good way to sell is to approach mostly preschools and elementary schools that have a spring fair where they do a fundraiser for the school, and so we

market to them at a little bit of a discount, but, you know, they get wholesale pricing, basically.

[00:32:27] And then they sell the honey to their, their own school, and that's been a really great source of customers.

[00:32:34] **David Crabill:** Right. So there's a lot in there. Let's start with the. Email list, you said 3, 500 people on your email list, that's, that's a lot. How often are you emailing them?

[00:32:47] **David Bock:** Yeah, not nearly enough. Probably once a month.

[00:32:50] **David Crabill:** And what are you using to manage that all?

[00:32:53] **David Bock:** I was using MailChimp, and then you said to switch to ConvertKit. So I switched to ConvertKit.

[00:33:01] **David Crabill:** Have you noticed I'm just curious any difference between MailChimp and ConvertKit?

[00:33:06] **David Bock:** Yeah, I like using ConvertKit better. it just seemed like MailChimp was changing their policies and I'm not really an expert on these things. I, I, all I know is I heard you say ConvertKit. Or I read in one of your newsletters that you preferred ConvertKit and so then I switched.

[00:33:20] **David Crabill:** I think probably the biggest thing for you being at 3, 500 contacts is, and this could have changed, but I'm pretty sure. ConvertKit is significantly less expensive than MailChimp. MailChimp is really cheap when you start because they have this, you know, free tier, but then once you get beyond that, it's kind of expensive.

[00:33:40] **David Bock:** That part for sure. For sure, yeah.

[00:33:43] **David Crabill:** so what do you currently price your honey at?

[00:33:47] **David Bock:** Well, if you buy it direct from me, there are a few options. You can pay \$17. For a 12 ounce jar, that would be the most you pay, and then if you get two jars, you take a couple of bucks off. If you get four jars, you get 20 percent off, and so I've sort of overpriced it if you're buying just one jar, and if you're interested.

[00:34:09] Bye bye. Get two or more, it comes down to, 15 or 14 a jar, but I'm trying, you know, I'm always trying to get about 1.50 an ounce, which covers, I won't say it makes me rich, but at least it makes profit,

[00:34:23] **David Crabill:** Do you only sell 12 ounce jars?

[00:34:26] **David Bock:** Oh, no, we have six ounce jars open, If you want to buy just one small jar, then I would charge you 13. If you get two of them, I would charge you twenty two dollars. If you got four of them, I'd charge, you know, I'd give you 20 percent off all four of them.

[00:34:46] **David Crabill:** So they could, they could even be over 2 per ounce.

[00:34:49]

[00:34:50] **David Bock:** Yeah, right, what is the difference there? Just The flavor or like what determines variable pricing.

[00:34:57] it's not the, the flavor in the jar. It's, it's just that it takes more labor, you know, it takes obviously twice as much labor to create two 6 ounce jars versus one 12 ounce jar. And the glass jars are pretty expensive, though the labels themselves, the price went up, the cap, And the labor of doing everything, filling the jars.

[00:35:18] well, you know all this stuff, and I'm sure your listeners are familiar with all this. First, someone has to drive down to the bottle store, place the order, wait around, get that, bring it back. Then we run all the jars to the dishwasher. We probably don't need to sterilize the jars, but I don't want to pack the honey in jars that come straight out of the factory.

[00:35:35] So there's that whole process of washing them all. Then we have a bottling machine, we set that up, and I usually need one extra person to help bottle. So you take two people to bottle all the honey, then it's all done, then you have a bunch of the jars are sticky for, even though they're not supposed to be, because of this machine that I use.

[00:35:52] But then you have a bunch of sticky jars, you clean them all off. And then it's time to start labeling them and get out the label maker, all that stuff. So it ends up being quite a bit of labor, partly because we're packing in small jars. But if we packed it in one pound or two pound jars, we would never get, be able to charge a price that would be high enough to pay us back to cover all the costs also create profit at the end.



[00:36:17] **David Crabill:** So, I saw that you also have like a special soft set honey that you charge more for.

[00:36:24] David Bock: Yeah, I was pricing that at an extra dollar, but now I'm sort of, the prices are kind of all the same for soft set. But, yeah, soft set, it's just another way of, it's creamed honey, is what it is. The reason I started calling it Soft Set is it is a little different than Creamed Honey in that when you open the jar, it's like a solid mass, sort of like when you open a yogurt, you wouldn't call yogurt a liquid, but it's giving it a little too much credit probably to say yogurt is a solid, you know, it's sort of in between. And so that's how our Soft Set Honey comes out. To be honest, I just switched and I got rid of the soft set stickers and now it's all just called creamed. But the reason we do that is because this is mostly for the retail our retail partners. If I deliver a case of liquid honey and it doesn't sell right away or Overnight, the store gets cool, like maybe down to 60 or between 60 and 65 degrees, the honey will start to crystallize.

[00:37:22] And if the honey crystallizes unevenly, so the, if the bottom half of the jar is crystallized and the top half is liquid, then customers don't want to buy it. And so that's created this whole issue where stores will, they'll buy a whole case, but then when I check in with them a few months later, they're like, yeah, no one wants to buy it because it looks like this.

[00:37:42] So, to address that, we started creating the creamed honey, which once it's done and it's, you give it time to, set up, it will be creamed honey forever. It's not going to change its state. it'll just be the same product, shelf stable product, until it's sold. So, that's how the Green County part came about.

[00:38:00] **David Crabill:** Is it just honey that has air whipped into it

[00:38:05] **David Bock:** it's liquid honey and we combine that with crystallized honey, but instead of coarse grainy crystals, we take the crystallized honey sample and we grind it up and we put it through a blender or sometimes a mortar and pestle to grind it and grind it until The crystals are so small that you can't feel them on your tongue anymore.

[00:38:25] So, it creates this paste, and that paste is itself made from honey that's crystallized. And so when you combine that paste back into the liquid honey and mix it all together, the liquid honey then will crystallize into this tasty consistency. it's like creamy peanut butter.

[00:38:45] **David Crabill:** but it still has the same flavor?

[00:38:48] **David Bock:** yeah, it has the exact same flavor, but because it's creamed, when you taste it to me it tastes better and also feels like it has more flavor. And I want to say the reason for that is it just stays in your mouth longer when it's, when it's creamed.

[00:39:05] And so you. Your nose and taste buds have more of a chance to get the flavor of the honey. That's a very pseudo scientific explanation, but that's what I think is going

[00:39:17] **David Crabill:** So are you only selling The creamed honey in stores now because of the issues with not shelf life. 'cause I know honey lasts forever, but because of the crystallization issues.

[00:39:28] **David Bock:** That's what I'm trying to do, but some stores still want liquid honey. And at Christmastime, we're in a bunch of stores that are, are not grocery stores. There's more like boutiques, little specialty. Boutique y, I want to say gift shop, but that's not the right way to describe them.

[00:39:44] You know, little fancy stores where they have lots of stuff that you would buy as a present for someone. And so around the holidays, they sell so fast that the liquid honey isn't an issue. But I'm trying to encourage the retailers to choose. the creamed honey instead. in spite of the fact that honey lasts forever, it into creamed honey makes it not only last a long time from a health perspective, but also from a marketing perspective.

[00:40:09]

[00:40:11] **David Crabill:** Well, I'm just trying to think about your journey. I mean, you started kind of by accident. You built this business up while still working as a writer and then, you know, you've been doing this pretty much full time for the last few years. and now you have employees, correct? How many employees do you have?

[00:40:28] **David Bock:** I have my two kids, they're part time and I have two other part time one guy sort of does everything and another, a woman meets me at the bee yards and helps me with the hive they've both been great.

[00:40:40] I've gotten really lucky, honestly, in a lot of different ways along, ever since starting Honey, the people who work for me have been, they I haven't really had to look for them. They email me or they get in touch on Instagram or whatever and say they have time, or they've always, they're changing jobs, or they, some of them I guess don't need a job, and they just have always been

curious about beekeeping, and so then I bring them in and I train. They generally buy their own beekeeper suit, and then they just start helping. And in the beginning, May, everybody said the same thing. Oh, you don't have to pay me. I just want to do it. I'm just so curious. I've always loved bees. I just want to volunteer. And then we work the first day, and they find out how much of the work is like scraping boxes, carrying something from this side of the yard to the other side of the yard, or mixing sugar syrup.

[00:41:29] And usually after the first couple of times they work, they say, okay, I've had enough, or if you want to pay me, I would keep doing it. And so, yeah, I don't have a problem paying people, even if they're just starting out. So much of the work, it doesn't look like a romantic slow motion TikTok video. It looks more like, you know, cleaning the garage.

[00:41:49] **David Crabill:** So even though you've been doing this for 10 years, it, I get the sense that you're still, it's still kind of fluid, right? You're still wanting to be able to sell more of the jars that you have on hand, maybe put more into marketing.

[00:42:04] You have different businesses that you're juggling all at the same time. Do you feel overwhelmed by, having to juggle all these businesses at once?

[00:42:13] **David Bock:** Yeah, as far as feeling overwhelmed, yeah, it happens, definitely. It happens only occasionally, so when everything comes together and a lot of stuff has to be done all in the same week, then I do start to get a little bit frantic. So sometimes we'll have to move hives to a new yard or out of a yard.

[00:42:31] At the same time that I have an order of queens arrive, and the queens have to be taken care of in a certain way, and at the same time we're bottling honey for an order, and at the same time we're planning a pop up event. When all of that happens in the same week, then it does feel like a bit much. That happened when we did a seasonal food show a few years ago, and that was, it took a lot of prep to get everything organized for that, and there's also a bunch of beekeeping going on right at that same time, but otherwise, it's pretty manageable. You know, once the hives are in place, and I know that they're healthy, and I know that the location is stable, let's say, the person who owns the yard isn't going to call me up and ask me to move the hives out and the weather is good and so on, then I can let the hives just do their thing like I say, for two or three weeks at a time without having to go and check on them. And so during those periods I can focus more on marketing and bottling. But yeah, there's always more to do. I never run out of chores. Everything I do, I can always

improve it, you know, I'm redesigning the labels now, my son did original artwork for a bunch of the labels, so I have to finalize those designs, and then having signs printed to direct more people to our, Patreon. Uh, The sales that we have in front of the house, that's actually been, I do have a marketing tip for everybody out there, if you don't sell from your own house, I recommend trying it, and if you think no one will come, I can strongly recommend having signs printed I think I spent about \$150, maybe \$200 on signs.

[00:44:04] So I had signs printed, and I attached them to those little A frame sign holders that the realtors use. you know, you see them all over the place on the corner when they're having an open house.

[00:44:16] So I got six of those, and I attached my signs to them. And that is just I mean, the amount of business that it drives right to our house has just been incredible. I mean, when we, when we started, I printed those signs, I guess, a year ago. And as soon as I printed them and put them out, we would sell over a thousand dollars of honey in a, in one day from our driveway. And so I was really surprised by that. I didn't expect it to. Work so well. I mean, there's nothing fancy about it. It's just a sign that says, that says local honey, and my address, and an a which way to go.

[00:44:50] **David Crabill:** Now, some people are in a situation where either Zoning ordinances and their city won't allow them to sell from home or they're in an HOA that's not going to allow it. If you weren't able to sell in front of your own house, what do you think you would do to maybe leverage the That strategy that you've now found, but without it being from your own home.

[00:45:12] **David Bock:** Yeah, I mean, the Homeowners Association says that's true. I have heard from a couple of people that they're not allowed to sell out of their house, but I, I never really understand that because as far as I know, everyone's allowed to have a garage sale. but yes, if it were impossible to sell, Right in front of my house, I would go to a street that has, you have to sort of look around to find a really good spot, but it should have enough traffic, you know, it should be near a main street or on a, heavily trafficked street that also has room for people to pull over, so that parking isn't an issue or so you don't create traffic where the neighbors would complain about it but that's what I would do.

[00:45:46] I would just pick a spot as close to my house as I could get just for convenience or travel time, and I would do the same thing there. especially having the same spot and being there every week or, twice a month or

something, you know, you have the same people, of course, in the area driving those streets.

[00:46:02] All the time, and being there consistently like I say, for us, it's every Sunday, but that has really helped to draw new customers and keep old customers coming back, and I finally realized that I should be putting a QR code on the bottom of the jars. And the QR code takes people's right to the website. So now, every time we have a pop up sale, every jar that we sell to someone who visited right in person, we tell them about the QR code, and so that has been slowly, increasing the online sales as well.

[00:46:34] **David Crabill:** Yeah. So basically just setting up what the roadside stand, you know, would be an easy way around that. And, you know, in some cases people might need to get a permit for that, but that's usually pretty doable. Um, just to address, you know, you said People can do garage sales from their home.

[00:46:50] I think the difference there is that, you know, it's not a business and it's not something that somebody is doing on a consistent basis. I also know that a lot of HOAs say you can't do a garage sale from your home either. And, you know, oftentimes we'll have like one neighborhood garage sale per year, so that's probably the difference there.

[00:47:08] It's just wanting to make sure that a neighborhood feels like a neighborhood doesn't feel like a business center is generally the intent behind it.

[00:47:15] **David Bock:** Right. I mean, it also helps to live in a really densely populated city, of course. that's an advantage to being here. I mean, are there other marketing and sales channels that you use for your business or that you've heard about from other people that I am not doing?

[00:47:32] **David Crabill:** Probably what stands out to me as I hear your story is you were talking about doing discounting on your website and doing discounting as people bought more, but what I've found that's worked really well in my fudge business is not doing discounting, but instead offering something for free. So, you know, in your case, it could be like, buy two 12 ounce jars, get, you know, a six ounce jar for free and whichever way it works out, you know, you set it up so that at the end of the day, you're basically making.

[00:48:06] Just the same amount of money that you would have made through the discount system, but that incentive for people to get something for free is

just much more compelling than, getting a dollar off or 2 off. And in the case of, you know, your online sales. So, you know, free shipping is always a big one.

[00:48:24] So, instead of offering a discount, you know, you say you buy three jars, get free shipping, something like that.

[00:48:30] **David Bock:** Okay. That's interesting. Yeah. I guess I would just have to do the math on that.

[00:48:35] **David Crabill:** Yeah. I don't know exactly how it would work, but I'm sure you could figure out a way to make it work and just test it at least, right. And see, if it draws people to buying more jars which is, I found it was the case in my. And, you know, what I think happens with this business is that, you know, I had the same pricing.

[00:48:54] People would buy more Fudge if I offered free shipping instead of, a discount. I mean the other thing that, probably. You could focus more on is just finding more wholesalers. You know, you have 15 accounts right now, I think you said, but that, that's just a matter of, pounding the pavement and getting out and connecting with more stores and.

[00:49:15] Trying to find more but you've got all this inventory, so it seems like instead of spending more time at markets that might be where your best use of time is because you don't have a production problem, you don't have an inventory problem, you just have a problem getting it out the door, so focusing your efforts on the product and direct sales is.

[00:49:39] probably one of the most effective ways, but it also just takes all that legwork up front and on a continuous basis. Cause you know, some, retailers will drop out over time. So yeah,

[00:49:51] **David Bock:** Yeah. I mean, and that's been in the beginning. Well, you know, I've raised my prices also, so it's been challenging. I did a really big push last summer to get into a bunch of stores and it was not as successful as I, as I hoped it would be considering the time. You know, I hired people to work on contacting the stores and the ConvertKit stuff, and then try to write a good introductory email and the pick all, all that stuff.

[00:50:19] it took a lot of effort and there wasn't as much interest from stores as I expected there'd be and lowering the price it won't work to keep covering our pub. And so, I am talking to a local health food chain called Lassen's and they have I think maybe 12 or 13 stores all in the LA area.

[00:50:38] And so, that's a possibility. There's one other chain. Oh, no, the one I'm thinking about is, the website FAIRE. you use them? F-A-I-R-E?

[00:50:48] **David Crabill:** I don't use them, but I've had other guests talk about them on the show.

[00:50:52] **David Bock:** Yeah, and that, I did create the account, but I, need to maybe promote that more. But the good thing about FAIRE, I think they let the Retailers, they get the product but they don't have to pay for 60 days. That's a big advantage for the retailer. but like you say there's, definitely more, than I need to do.

[00:51:07] just need to do it.

[00:51:08] **David Crabill:** don't know cause I haven't run a honey business, but one thing that might cause a problem with fare is I'm pretty sure the retailers will pay for the shipping of the product. So it's a great for the producer cause they don't have to worry about it. But you said that it's oftentimes not profitable to ship honey.

[00:51:30] So, I think all of the guests that have been on the podcast that have talked about Faire, most of their accounts are pretty far away from them, so they ship their product to those wholesale accounts.

[00:51:41] you live in a very densely populated area, so Maybe you'd find wholesalers that are near you, or maybe they'd be fine paying for the shipping.

[00:51:50] **David Bock:** right. Well, and, I mean the demand for Hollywood honey should be the greatest in Hollywood. So some of that stuff I can, deliver myself or use you know, that Uber delivery. It's kind of a recent thing with Uber. they'll hand deliver a package for you. So I've used that a few times also. But yeah, that's sort of our one of the current challenges.

[00:52:13] **David Crabill:** So there's certainly a lot of directions you could take the business. What are you currently looking at? Are you wanting to expand the marketing and sales? Are you wanting to spend more time helping other people start? Their own hives, or you want to spend more time relocating hives.

[00:52:30] where do you kind of envision the future?

[00:52:32] **David Bock:** So we're expanding now is actually the bee removal part because we get paid for every removal and so that can be a really

significant source of income and obviously that's the way to build up the hives faster too to expand the operation. So that's not part of the cottage food side but that's what I'm focusing on at least.

[00:52:52] For the past month, that's what I've been doing, is working on getting a contract with our water and power company to remove bees from the water meter boxes you know, they're all over the place, it's just that square plate, usually, on the ground where the meter is, where they read the meter.

[00:53:07] So these will move into those boxes very, very often. And so in the past, the water and power company has those bees, but now they switched to doing all live. And so they're using more people to do that job. And my son and his friend do a lot of those renewables, and then I know some other people who can also help with that, That, and also building this idea of the corporate sponsorship of the hive, where businesses would paint the hive boxes with their own branding, and then those hives would stay in one of my bee yards, and company that sponsors the hives would then get, all kinds of things. So, we make beeswax candles, and they would get honey every month.

[00:53:47] So, what, really, whatever they, whatever they want. Every deal is a little bit different. their employees would be able to come and visit the hive in my yard. They'd sort of take a hive tour. another part of the business that I'd like to talk about. Selling honey is sort of the easiest part of the business to understand, but it's only one third of the business.

[00:54:05] **David Crabill:** Do you feel like selling honey as a full time business is lucrative, or do you feel like you need to have these other pieces to it to make it a full time thing?

[00:54:18] **David Bock:** Yeah, no, it definitely needs to have several, several different kinds of income streams. for me If I wanted to do nothing but sell honey all day, I would need to scale up so much to produce enough jars that I would need to buy honey from other people, and then need to buy a lot more honey from other beekeepers, and then it would sort of change the whole point of the business, but honey that I want to sell comes from a specific neighborhood, from my own hive, and it's just Hollywood honey, it is, and we sell. For me to produce enough of my own Hollywood honey, I would need a much bigger operation, and it's sort of not what I want to do.

[00:54:57] I don't, I don't want to become the Biggest honey company I would also, I would never be able to do it from a home kitchen in that case. need a commercial kitchen and that would add a lot of expense and I would need more



staff to do the production consistently enough and so, yeah, the short answer to that question is I wouldn't be able to make it if I were only a food business.

[00:55:17] At least, I mean, maybe other people have figured out how to do it, but I haven't found a way to do it to make that work.

[00:55:22] **David Crabill:** I know that you run this as a full time business now, but I get the sense that it's kind of more than just a business for you, I mean you're really driven to do it. Do you feel like people need to have some kind of motivation other than revenue to focus on beekeeping and, try to start a honey cottage food business?

[00:55:44] **David Bock:** yeah, I would say so. there's so much to learn about it, there's so many little details to keep track of, and also so many ways to make mistakes that if you're not, really interested every day in what's happening in the beehive, then it's probably not going to be a very satisfying way of Spending your time.

[00:56:03] I mean definitely you can't just look at the bottom line to decide if you've succeeded or not. That's one of the reasons why I suppose people, you know, growers have sort of the same experience if you're, you're selling know your own produce people are interested and they're excited. They certainly like the Support local Ag businesses and the flavor of the food, the flavor is better and all that. Selling honey, we get so much positive reinforcement from customers all the time.

[00:56:30] I mean, virtually everyone who comes to the honey stand. They're all excited, to see that we're there. If they haven't been there before, they didn't realize there was beekeeping in the neighborhood. They didn't realize you could have your own hives. the only honey they've ever tasted is sort of the generic wildflower honey that they got from the store.

[00:56:47] when they come to our stand, they can taste each different kind. We usually have six or seven kinds, different flavors on the table. It's just a really enjoyable way of spending time because everybody has something nice to say about what we're doing.

[00:57:01] **David Crabill:** Well, thank you so much, David, for coming on and sharing your story with us. Now, if somebody would like to learn a bit more about you uh, where can they find you?

[00:57:10] How can they reach out?

[00:57:13] **David Bock:** Oh, well they could definitely go to the website, which is Buzzed Honeys with an S on the end. People could also go to, the website is not as much fun as our Instagram, which is also, you know, @buzzedhoneys.

[00:57:26] **David Crabill:** I will put the relevant links in the show notes and thank you so much for coming on the show and sharing with us today.

[00:57:32] **David Bock:** Thank you Dave.

[00:57:33]

[00:57:35] **David Crabill:** That wraps up another episode of the Forrager Podcast.

[00:57:38] For more information about this episode, go to [forrager.com/podcast/108](http://forrager.com/podcast/108)

[00:57:45] and if you're enjoying this podcast, please take a quick moment right now and leave me a review on Apple Podcasts. It doesn't have to be a long review, but it's truly the best way to support this show and will help others like you find this podcast.

[00:57:56] And finally, if you're thinking about selling your own homemade food, check out my free mini course where I walk you through the steps you need to take to get a cottage food business off the ground. To get the course, go to [cottagefoodcourse.com](http://cottagefoodcourse.com).

[00:58:07] Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.