On its way to the consumer, honey may pass through several stages of the market chain from beekeeper to co-operative, or trader to exporter. This article considers different containers used in bulk trade.

Beekeepers in remote locations often find it difficult to obtain affordable honey containers. Gourds are still used by some communities (see next page), however, where the maintenance of quality is paramount, air-tight, food-grade plastic containers are best. Stackable buckets with tight-fitting lids are widely used.

When large-scale honey buyers become established in an area, the use of correct containers is a key part of their quality assurance process. Managing the distribution of buckets to beekeepers and ensuring their return becomes a major task. Jerry cans should be avoided if there is any risk of the honey crystallising, as it then becomes difficult to remove the honey through the narrow neck of the jerry can without warming the honey.

In some places polythene lined sacks are replacing buckets and jerry cans as containers for honey. The advantages of the sacks are:

- Cheap
- Take up little room when empty and therefore transportation is cheaper
- Easy to print on and brand with the buyer's name and logo
- Provided that they are of high quality and well-sealed, spillage is less likely compared with buckets that can tip over and crack
- Some beekeepers believe that they are easier than buckets to carry on the back of bicycles.

Beekeepers in Cameroon use buckets to supply the honey buying company Guiding Hope. The honey is then transferred into polythene lined sacks for long distance transport to the processing facility. After final processing the honey is transferred into polyethylene drums that are then housed in a heavy-duty cage for export. The advantage of these types of containers (sometimes called IBCs - Intermediate Bulk Containers) is that they can be manoeuvred...
In some countries including Cameroon and Ethiopia polythene lined sacks are used for transport of honey using a fork-lift truck. Honey is also exported in 200 litre steel drums. The drums must be of good quality, coated with food-safe paint and be clean and moisture proof.

All containers must be:
- Clean and dry
- Food-grade quality
- Used for honey alone (second-hand containers can be used provided they were previously used only for food)
- Air and moisture tight.

Gourds are used in some areas of Ethiopia as honey containers. The gourds can be grown by beekeepers and are easy to transport.

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*Establishing a supply chain for honey and beeswax from rural beekeepers* and *Exporting honey and beeswax from Africa to Europe* (Beekeeping and Development Guides 3 and 4) are reviewed on page 18.

(left) Jerry cans are easily sourced in Uganda, but are unsuitable for storing honey that may crystallise

(right) Cylindrical metal drums are widely available in Zambia, but do not pack as efficiently as square sided containers