



Food Safety Credentials Make the World Their Market

These honey producers have spent the past two years attaining Hazard Analysis/Critical Control Points (HACCP) and Food Safety Systems Certification 22,000 (FSSC22K) certification, with help from Growing Forward 2. Now, they can sell anywhere.

Albertans are fortunate. From the Laughing Llama Esso in Ardrossan to the Value Drug Mart in Wetaskiwin, to Sam and Sandra Thiessen's home farm, we can buy Beary Berry Honey products all over the place.

Beary Berry Honey, the Thiessens' 700-hive beekeeping and honey operation located near Tofield, Alberta, markets a wide variety of pure honey, honey blended with natural ingredients, dressings and skin care products.

As Sandra Thiessen explains, serving their mostly Albertan customer base has been more than a full-time job for years now. "Things are really good and really busy," she says, "because we're getting to be in a lot more stores."

Now, Beary Berry Honey is poised for even bigger developments in 2016 and beyond. Over the past two years, with cost-sharing assistance from the *Growing Forward 2* Food Safety Processor Program, the Thiessens have changed how they produce honey and where they can sell it.

Full Steam Ahead

From 2007 to 2011, the Thiessens experienced many of the same production challenges as other Alberta beekeepers. An unusual flood of pest threats – principally varroa mite and nosema disease – caused severe winterkill for several winters in a row.

"Five years ago, we lost about half of our hives," Thiessen recalls. "It's much better now. New medications have helped a lot."

In 2013, in a statement of confidence in the future, the Thiessens built a new honey extraction facility to meet changing regulations coming from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

Growing Forward 2 provided some cost-sharing to get this facility up and running. A key change from the Thiessens' previous facility was to have a separation between the extraction area, the brood boxes, and the commercial kitchen area.

Today, Beary Berry Honey operates two honey extraction lines, with two teams of people going steady, on stainless steel equipment. Using this equipment, their products can now be shipped virtually anywhere in the world. That's the result of the Thiessens' intensive journey to attain two globally recognized food safety credentials: HACCP and FSSC22K.



Costco on Line 1

With support from *Growing Forward 2*, the Thiessens hired a consultant to help them through the rigorous process of identifying potential food safety hazards, addressing them, developing exhaustive HACCP and FSSC22K plans and having those plans validated and approved. Their final HACCP audit took place in May 2015.

HACCP and FSSC22K are distinct standards, with some jurisdictions requiring one or the other. When you have both, the world's your market.

"It gives us a competitive advantage," says Thiessen. "We can now sell inter-provincially and globally. Without these certifications, CFIA wouldn't allow us to do this. Now, we can ship anywhere in the world."

Three years ago, Costco approached the Thiessens to ask about carrying Beary Berry Honey products. Lack of HACCP meant the buyer couldn't move forward. It was a different story when Costco called back recently.

With a solid base of customers here in Alberta, a first-class food-safe production facility, and a global green light with HACCP and FSSC22K, the Thiessens are ready to capture opportunity everywhere.

Says Sandra Thiessen: "Alberta is known worldwide for honey. We have the highest-quality honey in the world. Places like Japan want to see that you have a food safety program in place, and now we do. That demand is not going to go away."

Growing Forward 2 is a federal – provincial – territorial initiative.