

## Akron Honey Grows from a Vacant Lot to a Community Staple on Meijer Shelves

What began as a simple experiment in beekeeping has blossomed into a thriving community enterprise for Brent Wesley — known as Wesley the Keeper — the owner of Akron Honey. In 2013, Wesley purchased a vacant lot in West Akron, Ohio, with a vision of creating something unique for his neighborhood.

“We wanted to give our community something to brag about,” Wesley recalled. “I bought the lot, Googled how to keep bees, and that was the first year I tasted real honey.”

After starting with just a few beehives, Wesley now has a thriving business that produces honey known for its distinctive flavor.

Akron Honey has garnered a loyal following, with its products now available at Meijer stores throughout the Greater Cleveland area.

“Our honey became known for its taste,” Wesley explained. “City honey has a different flavor than honey produced on farms because the floral diversity is much broader.”

Encouraged by the success of his first apiary in West Akron, Wesley expanded to a second lot in East Akron. There, he began producing a unique, darker honey known as Middlebury Red, named after the historic area where it’s made.

Innovation has been a cornerstone of Akron Honey’s growth. The company began experimenting with flavor infusions, such as habanero peppers, and partnered with Cleveland Whiskey to create Bourbon Barrel honey—a smooth blend with a subtle bourbon flavor.

In 2021, Wesley stepped into Akron Honey full-time, after a varied career as a touring musician, aerobics instructor, and corporate general manager. He credits the business’ growth to a customer-first approach and strong community support.

“Our honey lovers are at the center of every decision we make,” Wesley said of Akron Honey’s loyal customers. “We listen to them, and that’s how we’ve grown.”

Akron Honey’s quality and community focus caught the attention of Alan Jordan, store director at the Fairfax Meijer Market in Cleveland and also Meijer buyer, Stacy Grooters-Farr. Stacy believed the product would be a great addition to the newly launched Local Favorites program. She partnered with the Meijer Local Sourcing team to expand Akron Honey to nine Meijer supercenters across the Cleveland area as a part of the inaugural Ohio set.

Wesley’s journey has been as much about placemaking as it has been about honey. Every year, Akron Honey hosts Akron Honey Market Day, a block party that brings together small businesses, food trucks, and music in front of its urban apiary, a collection of beehives.

“It’s about bringing people together,” Wesley said. “We’ve been doing this for years, and people don’t even realize they’re crossing historic divides in our city. They’re just having a good time.”

Beyond the business, Wesley and his team are dedicated to honeybee education, particularly for children in public schools, many of whom have little understanding of where their food comes from.

“We’ve done tons of tours and field trips to our facility,” Wesley said. “It’s important for kids to understand the significance of bees and food production.”

For Wesley, beekeeping is more than just a business; it’s a peaceful and educational practice. He believes that studying the disciplined, selfless nature of honeybees could offer valuable lessons for solving many of humanity’s

challenges.

As Akron Honey continues to grow, Wesley remains committed to the community, education, and expanding the company's presence while staying true to its roots. With the support of partners like Meijer, Wesley sees a bright future ahead.

"They're more than just a retailer to us; they're partners," Wesley said.

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