

**START SMALL
— FARMS —**

**A *Beeswax* Guide
for Small-Batch
Makers**

*What to buy, what to ask, and what to avoid
before you put your name on it*

US MARKET • MID-2026 • FOR MAKERS BUYING 1-55 LB

A note from our workbench

We're learning to make things at Start Small Farms. Soap and candles, and lately balms too, the kind of goods that go in a gift box and, eventually, onto someone's skin. Somewhere in the middle of that I fell down a hole on beeswax and couldn't climb back out for about a week.

The thing I kept snagging on: you can't just buy something, pour it in a tin, and put your name on it. When it's going on someone's lips, the cheap anonymous stuff can do real harm. And when it doesn't, buying blind still means you didn't do the work. Neither one is us.

So I read the pharmacopeia specs, the adulteration surveys, the import data, and way too many supplier pages, and I wrote it all down. This is that write-up, cleaned up for anyone else making small batches. The prices are a mid-2026 snapshot and they move, so check before you buy.

— Kim, Start Small Farms

THE 60-SECOND VERSION

- **Budget ~\$10–\$20/lb at hobby quantities (1–5 lb) and ~\$6–\$13/lb in bulk (25–55 lb).** For most US small-batch makers, the safe default is US-sourced cosmetic/NF-grade yellow or white pastilles from a reputable soap-supply house (Bramble Berry, Bulk Apothecary, Lotioncrafter). It's filtered and traceable, and it stays consistent batch to batch. White runs 10–40% more than yellow; certified organic is roughly 2×.
- **Adulteration is real but manageable.** A nationwide Belgian survey found 9.2% of beekeeper samples and 33.3% of commercial samples cut, mostly with paraffin and stearic acid. Buy from suppliers who state country of origin and will send a Certificate of Analysis (COA). Skip the anonymous "100% pure" marketplace listings for anything going on skin.
- **Regulation is lighter than you'd fear for a true hobbyist.** Beeswax's INCI name is **Cera Alba** (white) or **Cera Flava** (yellow), and it is not vegan. Under MoCRA, makers under \$1M average annual US cosmetic sales are exempt from facility registration and product listing. But add an SPF or a "heals chapped lips" claim and your balm becomes an OTC drug with a much heavier rulebook.

What it costs

I pulled these from live supplier pages in July 2026. Prices move a lot, so re-check before you buy.

Yellow (natural) vs. white (refined), 1-lb retail

Supplier	Yellow, 1 lb	White, 1 lb	Note
Bramble Berry (WA)	\$11.99	\$19.69 (Premium White)	US-sourced; publishes usage guidance
Bulk Apothecary (OH)	\$15.31	\$14.32	Deepest bulk discounts
Lotioncrafter (WA)	in catalog	\$17.95 (White NF)	USA-made; strong tech docs
Amazon "Beesworks"	~\$13.99	~\$14-16	Unverified; comparatively trusted brand
Sweet Comb / Candle Cocoon	~\$11.99	—	—

Volume break points

Bulk pricing usually kicks in at 4-8 lb (Bulk Apothecary) or 5 lb (elsewhere); the deepest discounts need 25-55 lb.

Bramble Berry Yellow, 5 lb	\$10.20/lb
Bramble Berry Premium White, 55 lb	\$12.80/lb
Bulk Apothecary White, 8 lb	\$8.05/lb
Bulk Apothecary White, 55 lb	\$6.03/lb
Lotioncrafter White NF, 5 lb	\$14.59/lb

The real premiums

Certified organic: the real premium, roughly 2x conventional. Bulk Apothecary organic is \$28.51/lb at 1 lb (vs. ~\$14-15), narrowing to \$13.13/lb at 55 lb.

Cera Bellina (polyglyceryl-3 beeswax, the anti-grain modified wax): Lotioncrafter runs \$37.95/lb at 1 lb, \$30.49/lb at 20 lb.

USP-NF grade rarely costs extra at hobby scale. Most cosmetic beeswax is already processed to NF specs.

Form: pastilles vs. blocks

Pellets/pastilles and blocks cost about the same per pound from cosmetic suppliers. Pastilles melt faster and are easy to weigh; blocks (typical of beekeepers) must be grated or chopped and often re-melted and filtered. Buy pastilles for ease unless you're sourcing raw from a beekeeper. Raw beekeeper wax is the cheapest per pound but the most work.

Where to buy

Soap & cosmetic ingredient suppliers (best default)

- **Bramble Berry** (Bellingham, WA): yellow, premium yellow (US-sourced, solvent-free filtered), premium white (air/sun deodorized, no chemical bleach). 1 lb to 55 lb. Beginner-friendly, SDS available.
- **Bulk Apothecary** (OH): white, yellow, and certified-organic granules; among the lowest bulk prices. Some lot-quality/scent complaints, so ask about specifics.
- **Lotioncrafter** (WA): Beeswax White NF (USA-made) plus Cera Bellina; cosmetic-focused with strong documentation.
- **Wholesale Supplies Plus / Crafter's Choice**: yellow pastilles (states origin: China; some report a smoky odor) and ultra-refined white; free shipping over \$25.
- **Making Cosmetics, Formulator Sample Shop, Nurture Soap, Windy Point, Essential Wholesale, The Chemistry Store**: all active; Formulator Sample Shop is good for small trial sizes.
- **US Organic**: USDA-certified organic specialist.

Beeswax specialists / refiners

Koster Keunen (Watertown, CT) is a major US refiner and the originator of Cera Bellina. Mostly wholesale, but their specs are an industry reference. GloryBee (OR) supplies filtered cosmetic beeswax, and British Wax (UK) publishes excellent refining detail.

Local beekeepers & apiaries

Find them via state beekeeping associations, farmers' markets, and honey directories. Expect **\$5–\$12/lb**, blocks not pellets, natural color variation, and a honey scent. Ask how it was rendered, whether it's cappings wax (cleanest) or brood-comb wax (darker), and what miticides they use. You'll need to re-melt and filter it yourself.

MARKETPLACE CAUTION

Amazon and Etsy are convenient and cheap, but origin and grade are often unstated or wrong, "cosmetic grade / 100% pure" is an unverifiable seller claim, listings get hijacked and reformulated under the same reviews, and there's no COA. Reviews repeatedly report a chemical/paraffin smell and wax that "melts like a cheap candle." **Use marketplaces freely for candles and crafts; for leave-on skincare, prefer a supplier who names the origin and provides a COA.** Beesworks (triple-filtered, US facility) is a comparatively trusted marketplace brand.

Supplier reality check: most soap-supply houses have no minimum order (1 lb is fine), do *not* publish a COA by default but will email one on request (always ask), carry both yellow and white and often organic, and offer free shipping over a threshold. Country of origin is the least-disclosed data point, so you'll usually have to ask for it.

Where it actually comes from

The US doesn't produce enough beeswax for its own demand and is a net importer, so most US-market wax is imported and origin is largely hidden. By shipment count (Volza, Jul 2024–Jun 2025), China leads US supply (~31%), followed by the US itself (re-exports/domestic, ~17%) and Vietnam (~12%). Value-based figures put China first by a wide margin. Global production concentrates in Malaysia, India, and China.

Character and risk by origin. Origin is "sometimes / rarely" disclosed, so you usually have to ask.

Region	Character	Adulteration risk	Price	Origin disclosed?
US domestic	Golden, strong honey scent; cappings cleanest	Low	Higher	Sometimes
Europe	Golden, gentle, well-regulated	Low–moderate	Highest	Sometimes
Ethiopia / E. Africa	Variable, often darker	Moderate	Mid	Rarely
Brazil	Light, "bleachable"	Moderate	Mid	Rarely
India	Variable, higher saponification	Moderate	Low–mid	Rarely
Vietnam	Variable, industrial export	Moderate–high	Low	Rarely
China	Variable; often refined/bleached for export	Highest. Paraffin routinely added to foundation wax	Low	Rarely

Trade note: beeswax moves under HS heading 1521. 2024 world exports of vegetable waxes and beeswax were led by Brazil (\$116M), China (\$54M), and Germany (\$35M); the US was the top importer (~\$66M). Because the US is import-dependent, general tariff and trade shifts flow through to bulk prices.

Yellow vs. white (and how white is made)

Yellow (Cera Flava) is natural, carries the honey scent, and tints a finished product golden. **White (Cera Alba)** is decolorized for a neutral, scent-free base, and costs 10–40% more. Choose by what you're making and whether a honey tint helps or hurts the look and color you want.

"White" doesn't automatically mean "chemically bleached"

There are three routes to white wax, and reputable cosmetic white is usually one of the first two:

1. **Physical filtration:** pressure filtration plus clay (Fuller's earth) and activated carbon. No chemical residue concern. Common for cosmetic white.
2. **Sun / air bleaching:** thin sheets exposed to UV over days or weeks. Gentlest, no residues. (Bramble Berry's premium white is air/sun exposed, "no chemicals used.")
3. **Chemical bleaching:** hydrogen peroxide (most common) or, rarely, stronger agents for industrial grades. Reputable processors follow peroxide with carbon/earth filtration to strip residues. Chlorine-based agents must never be used.

Does it matter for skin safety?

For properly finished cosmetic/NF white beeswax, there's no meaningful safety difference between routes. It matters for your **"natural" marketing** (chemical bleaching undercuts a natural claim) and for **scent** (all bleaching removes the honey aroma). So ask the supplier straight out: *"Is your white beeswax filtered, sun-bleached, or chemically bleached, and if peroxide, is it carbon-filtered afterward?"* If they can't or won't answer, assume you don't know.

Is it real? Adulteration & home tests

How common: the most-cited survey (Deloge et al., *PLOS One*, 2021) found **9.2%** of beekeeper samples and **33.3%** of commercial samples adulterated, at 12–79% paraffin or 1–21% stearin. A 2024 ATR-IR study found paraffin accounts for ~74% of detected adulteration and stearic acid ~26%, with commercial products cut ~27% of the time vs. 12.5% for honeycomb samples. Paraffin adulteration of foundation wax is described as "routine" in China.

Common adulterants: paraffin and microcrystalline wax (most common), stearic acid/stearin, carnauba, tallow, and soy/palm waxes, plus over-processed wax that's lost its beneficial character.

PRACTICAL HOME TESTS (AND THEIR LIMITS)

Test	What real beeswax does	Limit
Melt point	Melts 62–65 °C (144–147 °F). Much lower suggests paraffin.	Needs a good thermometer; small blends barely shift it.
Chew / bite	Not sticky; chews to a non-sticky mass, bites into thin flakes.	Subjective.
Cold snap / shave	Fine-to-granular cut surface, spiral shavings.	Experience-dependent.
Water float	Density ~0.96, so it floats.	Paraffin floats too, so this only catches dense additives.
Ethanol test	Filtrate stays clear.	Milky = stearic acid; won't detect paraffin.
Saponification cloud	Solution clears at/below 65 °C.	Clearing above 65 °C flags paraffin. Needs KOH + care; most reliable at-home-ish test.
Bloom over time	Develops a harmless white bloom (sign of authenticity).	Takes weeks; refined whites bloom less.

Home tests catch gross fraud (a lot of paraffin or stearic acid), but they miss low-level cutting. Only GC/IR lab testing or a supplier's COA is definitive.

Reading a COA (the numbers that matter)

You won't titrate your own wax. What you'll do is glance at the supplier's Certificate of Analysis and confirm the values sit in range. Pharmacopeial reference values for yellow beeswax (USP-NF / Ph. Eur. / FCC):

- **Melting range 62–65 °C:** the one number that matters most to you. Confirms real beeswax and predicts firmness.
- **Acid value 17–24** (mg KOH/g). Rises with age and overheating.
- **Ester value 70–80.**
- **Saponification ~87–104.**
- **Ester/acid ratio ~3.3–4.2:** a narrow, stable "fingerprint." Outside this = adulteration or overheating.
- **Hydrocarbon content** naturally up to ~14.5%; higher suggests paraffin.
- **Saponification cloud test:** clears above 65 °C = paraffin/microcrystalline.
- **Lead** not more than 5 mg/kg.

What matters to you: melting point (firmness plus authenticity), and, from the COA, the ester/acid ratio and cloud test as anti-fraud checks. **What's largely irrelevant** at 1–25 lb: chasing exact ester/acid numbers yourself, and lab-only IR identity. Ask for the COA, glance at melting point, confirm the values are in range.

Certifications & label words

Means something

- **USP-NF / Ph. Eur. grade:** meets pharmacopeial identity and purity specs. A genuine anti-adulteration signal, usually little/no premium at hobby scale. Prefer it.
- **USDA Organic:** organic forage, no prohibited miticides. ~2× cost. Worth it only if you specifically market "organic."
- **Food grade / FCC:** meets food-additive (E901) specs. Reassuring, not more stringent than NF for skin.
- **Fair Trade:** beekeeper wages and conditions. Ethical, not a quality/safety metric.

Marketing, not proof

- **"Cosmetic grade":** no legal definition.
- **"100% pure":** an unverifiable claim.
- **"Natural," "triple-filtered," "pharmaceutical grade"** (without a stated monograph): starting points for questions, not guarantees.

The FDA does not define "natural" or "organic" for cosmetics. Treat these words as prompts to ask the real question, not answers.

The rules (lightly, for a small maker)

This is general information, not legal advice. Confirm your own obligations at [fda.gov/cosmetics](https://www.fda.gov/cosmetics) or with counsel.

- **INCI name:** **Cera Alba** for white beeswax, **Cera Flava** for yellow. FDA accepts "Beeswax (Cera Alba)" in the ingredient declaration. (CAS 8012-89-3.)
- **FDA cosmetic labeling:** ingredients in descending order, plus identity statement, net quantity, and responsible-party name/address.
- **MoCRA small-business exemption:** if your average gross annual US cosmetic sales over the prior 3 years are under \$1,000,000, you're exempt from facility registration, product listing, and (future) GMP rules. The exemption is voided for products that contact the eye's mucous membrane, are injected or ingested, or alter appearance for more than 24 hours. GMP and fragrance-allergen rules were still not finalized as of mid-2026.

THE LINE THAT TURNS A BALM INTO A DRUG

The wax is inert. Your *claims* are what trigger drug status. Add **SPF** or "**prevents sunburn**" and it's an OTC sunscreen (monograph actives, Drug Facts panel, establishment registration, fees, drug GMP, well beyond hobby reach). "Prevents/treats chapped lips" is a **skin-protectant drug claim** that needs a monograph active like allantoin or white petrolatum, and beeswax isn't one. **Keep hobby lip-balm claims purely cosmetic:** "moisturizes," "softens."

Vegan: beeswax is animal-derived, so a product with it **cannot be labeled vegan**. It can be "cruelty-free" if that standard is met (different claim). Vegan swaps: candelilla wax, carnauba, or synthetic beeswax.

Using it

Typical usage by product

Lip balm	~10–30%
Salves / ointments	~10–20%
Lotion / massage bars	~25–33%
Body butter	0–8%
Lotions / creams	~1–5%
Deodorant sticks	~10–20%

How much to buy

1 lb makes on the order of 100+ lip-balm tubes or dozens of salve tins. For most hobbyists **1–2 lb is a year's supply**. Buy 5–10 lb only if you're selling regularly, 25 lb+ only for steady production (mind bloom and odor absorption over long storage).

Storage & shelf life

Effectively **indefinite** kept cool, dry, dark, and sealed. Wrap it, since wax readily picks up dust and odors.

Bloom

The harmless white powdery film that develops on genuine wax as soft components migrate and crystallize. A **sign of authenticity**, not spoilage. Wipe or gently warm to remove. Refined/blended waxes bloom less.

Grainy balms are (almost) never the wax "Sandy" balms come from **untempered shea, cocoa, or mango butter** re-crystallizing unevenly on a slow cool. It's not the beeswax. Fully melt the butters (~75 °C), cool **fast** (fridge or freezer right after pour), and/or add **Cera Bellina at 2–5%**. Don't re-melt finished balm repeatedly.

The two lists to keep by your bench

Ask yourself first

- 1 What am I making, and what firmness do I need (drives yellow vs. white and %)?
- 2 Do I want the honey scent (yellow) or a neutral base (white)?
- 3 Will yellow tint the finished color unacceptably?
- 4 What's my budget per pound, and does my batch cadence justify bulk?
- 5 How much will I really use in 6-12 months (storage vs. bloom/odor)?
- 6 Do I need an "organic," "natural," or "US-sourced" claim?
- 7 Is a vegan claim important? (If so, beeswax is out.)
- 8 Will any product carry a drug claim (SPF, "heals")? Am I ready for that?
- 9 Do I have cool, dry, sealed storage?
- 10 Butters in the formula? Then consider Cera Bellina for graininess.

Then ask the supplier

- 1 What's the country of origin?
- 2 Yellow (Cera Flava) or white (Cera Alba)? If white, how was it decolorized?
- 3 What grade (cosmetic, NF/USP, food/FCC, organic), and can you send the COA and SDS?
- 4 What's the melting point, and are acid/ester/saponification values in range?
- 5 Has it been tested for paraffin/stearic-acid adulteration?
- 6 Any statement on pesticide/miticide residues (coumaphos, fluvalinate)?
- 7 What form (pastilles or block), and is it filtered and ready to use?
- 8 MOQ, volume tiers, shipping, free-shipping threshold?
- 9 Is color and scent consistent batch to batch? Return policy if a lot smells off?
- 10 Certified organic or Fair Trade, and by which certifier (if I need that claim)?

Our take, by stage

Stage 1: Starting out (1–5 lb, testing recipes)

Buy US-sourced yellow or white cosmetic/NF pastilles from **Bramble Berry or Lotioncrafter** (traceable, consistent, good docs), or **Bulk Apothecary** if price is paramount. Expect \$12–\$20/lb. Skip organic unless you'll market it. Buy pastilles, not blocks. *Move on once you're reordering more than ~5 lb/quarter.*

Stage 2: Selling regularly (5–25 lb)

Move to volume tiers (Bulk Apothecary 8-lb+ or Bramble Berry 5-lb) to hit \$8–\$13/lb. **Always request the COA and file it.** If balms go grainy, add Cera Bellina at 2–5%. Decide deliberately on yellow vs. white for brand consistency.

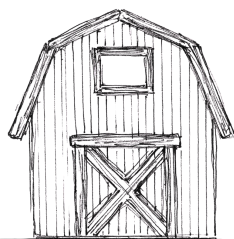
Stage 3: Established brand (25 lb+)

Buy 55-lb quantities (~\$6–\$13/lb) or build a named US refiner/beekeeper relationship for traceability and a story. Lock in origin and COA per lot. If you're pursuing "organic," certify the supply chain, not just the wax. Confirm your MoCRA status if you approach ~\$1M average annual sales.

One rule holds at every stage: never put anonymous-marketplace "100% pure" wax into a leave-on skincare product without at least running the home tests first. Prefer suppliers who disclose origin and provide a COA. Keep every lip and skin claim strictly cosmetic unless you intend to run a compliant OTC drug operation.

THE FINE PRINT

Prices are a July 2026 snapshot read from live pages and change often; a few points (Wholesale Supplies Plus per-lb, Making Cosmetics plain beeswax, live Amazon Beesworks) could not be verified and are flagged in the text. Re-check URLs before purchase. "Rising prices" is directional, from market-research value forecasts and documented supply risk, not a US retail price index. Adulteration rates come from European (Belgium/EU) surveys; no equivalent recent US commercial survey was found, so US rates are inferred. Origin percentages are import shares from trade-data aggregators and vary by dataset and year. MoCRA timelines are shifting, so verify current status at [fda.gov/cosmetics](https://www.fda.gov/cosmetics). Regulatory content here is general information, not legal advice.



START SMALL — FARM —

Start small.

*You don't need the whole thing
figured out to begin.*

This is one page from our messy, build-in-public middle.
We're learning to make good things and writing down what
we find. If it saved you a rabbit hole, come say hi.

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