Name: _____ Date: _____

How Did a Lemonade Stand Become a Company?

Reading level 10 (6th grade) · 1279 words

How does a lemonade stand turn into a company that sells in grocery stores? Mikaila Ulmer's story shows one way. In 2009, when she was four, she began selling lemonade in Texas. In March 2016, Time reported that Whole Foods had signed a deal to sell her lemonade in 55 stores. In summer 2025, a magazine profile said she still manages the company. In between came a recipe, some rules, a TV pitch and a lot of bees.

The idea began with a scare. In 2009, bees stung her twice in one week. "When I was four years old, I got stung by two bees in one week," she said later. She was afraid of them, and she was encouraged to turn that fear into a research project. She said she learned that bees were dying at an alarming rate. She decided to start a business that could help them.

Every business needs something to sell, and she had it. She had an old recipe for flaxseed lemonade from her great-grandmother, in a cookbook from the 1940s. She added honey. Honey did two jobs. It sweetened the drink. It also told a story about bees on every bottle. A drink with a clear reason is easy to explain to a buyer, a shop owner or a judge on a TV show.

Her first sales were small, at events built for young business owners in Texas. They were Lemonade Day and the Acton Children's Business Fair, and she was encouraged to make a drink to sell there. Lemonade Day says it teaches youth how to start, own and run a business. In cities that take part, youth get to run a real business. Later sales grew from those first small ones, one bottle at a time.

Soon other people sold it. One report said a local pizza shop and a Whole Foods Market in Texas sold the drink. A shop is a customer too. The owner must believe the drink will sell. The shop also needs a steady supply. A stand can open on one Saturday. A store wants bottles week after week. That is where the rules about food come in, and they come in fast.

These rules belong to one state, Texas, and other states differ. The Texas health department says a booth that sells open food or drink to the public generally needs a permit. Its guidance, dated 2016 and revised in 2019, makes children's neighborhood lemonade stands an exception in the areas its regional offices serve. The reason it gives is that such drinks are a minimal risk when hygiene is good. Rules start with the stand.

A 2019 law, House Bill 234, adds that cities and counties may not require a permit or fee for occasional drink sales by someone under 18, on private property or in a public park. That is a narrow rule. It covers occasional sales, not a business that sells week after week. Food rules differ by state and by what is sold, so a grown-up should always check them first. Other places may have other rules.

Bottles for stores are a different case. In Texas, a company that makes bottled drinks to sell to stores generally needs a food manufacturer license. Bottling plants for soft drinks and juice are listed as examples. A licensed maker generally cannot work in a home kitchen. A business that puts its name and address on a label is responsible for what is in the bottle. As of May 2017, her lemonade was made at a commercial facility near San Antonio.

The national rule works the same way. The Food and Drug Administration says food facilities that make, pack or hold food for people in the United States must generally register with it. They renew every other year. These rules show why a stand and a bottle differ. A bottle may reach many stores, so many more people depend on it being made safely. Food safety rules aim to keep buyers safe.

A name matters once a drink leaves the stand. The first name was BeeSweet Lemonade. In 2016, the company changed it to Me & the Bees Lemonade. Mikaila gathered ideas from contacts and customers. She also ran informal focus groups with classmates. A focus group is a small circle of people who say what they think of an idea before it is final. The new name put both her and the bees in it.

In March 2015, Mikaila, then ten, pitched her BeeSweet drink on a TV show called Shark Tank, where business people hear plans. A pitch is a short talk that explains a business and asks for backing. One report said Daymond John offered $60,000 for a 25 percent stake. A stake is what an investor gets in return for money. A 25 percent stake means owning one quarter of the company. The show runs on ABC.

Stores came next. In March 2016, Time reported that Whole Foods had signed a deal to sell the drink in 55 stores. It named Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma. A distributor moves goods from makers to stores. It is a link in the chain. She also announced wider distribution through one called UNFI. A distributor lets a small brand reach many stores through one partner. A drink can then travel far past one person's reach.

Why would bees be worth building a business on? Pollination is the move of pollen from the male part of a flower to the female part. It is how many plants make seeds and fruit. Wind, water and animals can carry pollen. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says honey bees help pollinate many crops and over one-third of U.S. produce. A University of Missouri page lists almonds, apples, blueberries, melons and strawberries among crops highly dependent on honey bees.

What happens inside a hive? A University of Delaware page says a honey bee colony typically has three kinds of adult bees: workers, drones and a queen. At her busiest, a queen may lay up to 1,500 eggs in a day. Drones are males, and their main job is to mate with a young queen. Workers are females. They do almost all the rest. Each colony has just one queen. The rest are her helpers and mates.

A worker's jobs depend mainly on her age. A University of Florida page says a young worker cleans cells first. Then she feeds larvae, up to 100 times a day. Later she may become a forager and fly out for nectar and pollen. Nectar can be up to 80 percent water. A forager adds an enzyme as she swallows it. Back in the hive, bees fan their wings over it to dry it out. What is left is honey, and the lemonade holds some.

Back to Mikaila and her bee idea. In 2016 she founded the Healthy Hive Foundation. A magazine profile said it focuses on protecting all bees, especially wild and native species most at risk. By February 2019, one report said it had paid for a bee yard, called an apiary. The report also said she had taught more than 100 beekeeping classes. The company says a share of its profits goes to groups working to save honeybees.

Where does it stand now? The latest report is a magazine profile from summer 2025, which says she still manages Me & the Bees Lemonade. A summer worker bee lives about six weeks. A company named for bees has been selling since 2009. It began with two stings, one old recipe and a stand in Texas. That path ran through rules, a pitch, a name change and a deal with a store chain.

Questions

1. What does a 25 percent stake in a company mean?

A. Owning one quarter of it
B. Paying a quarter of its bills each month
C. Working there a quarter of the year

2. What did the Texas health department say about children's neighborhood lemonade stands?

A. They need a new permit every year
B. They must sell only in parks
C. They are an exception to the usual permit rule

3. Why is supplying a store harder than running a stand?

A. Stores sell only honey drinks
B. A store needs steady supply, and food has rules
C. Stores are closed on Saturdays

4. In the sentence "A pitch is a short talk that explains a business and asks for backing," what does backing mean?

A. Support
B. A seat at the back
C. A loud sound

5. What does a forager bee do?

A. Lays eggs for the whole colony all day
B. Guards the queen from every danger
C. Flies out to find nectar and pollen

Words to know

pollination: moving pollen
distributor: supplier to stores
license: legal permission
forager: food-gathering bee
stake: ownership share
pitch: sales talk

Answer key: How Did a Lemonade Stand Become a Company?

1. A. Owning one quarter of it
2. C. They are an exception to the usual permit rule
3. B. A store needs steady supply, and food has rules
4. A. Support
5. C. Flies out to find nectar and pollen