



Beekeeping: A source of buffer income for farmers

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In a country like India, where farmers are reeling under the distress of erratic monsoons and low profits for their products, a buffer source of income is a welcome step. In such a scenario, beekeeping is a good source of income generation and sustainable livelihood option for the farmers. On one hand, where it benefits the farmers through various value added products, on the other hand, it helps in pollination of different crops. Government organization like Krishi Vigyan Kendras are providing the farmers with pollination services through beekeeping boxes at meagre prices. The rich traditional use of honey has paved a way for sustainable livelihood for many communities across the world. However, this sector too is marred with issues like adulteration, unscientific collection practices among others. Increase in productivity and quality produce of honey would raise the economic benefits from the practice of beekeeping. Premium quality of honey production and other value added products would fetch high economic returns for communities, if technology assisted and quality assured production is done at the source level.

India has two biodiversity hotspots, in Western Ghats and North East Region which support an ideal condition for growth of different flowers and medicinal plants. This offers an opportunity where the honey production through bee rearing can be taken up by tribal women as a secondary income source. Despite the immense potential in terms of resources and biodiversity, the two regions are least explored regions in the country. The area harbours world's biodiversity hotspot. An area with such a rich flora has a wide scope for developing secondary source of income like honey production from plants. This potential, however, has remained underutilized and has not translated into economic prosperity. The poverty, unemployment rate and incidences such as farmer suicide in the regions is significantly high because of high mounting debt on farmers due to drought conditions, weak infrastructure, lack of skills among the tribals and insufficient promotion of

entrepreneurial activities. There is an urgent need for socio-economic empowerment of tribal women in these areas. Beekeeping is an excellent source of secondary source of income for the tribal women. However, lack of awareness and proper skill training programme for the tribal women, makes it a less profound source of income generation. It is important to generate sustainable livelihood options in the region for development of the region and its people.



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Madhu Sandesh, a pilot project, was designed by KVK, Baramati to help farmers and beekeepers communicate and achieve optimal quality and crop yields through the usage of pollination, the adoption of good beekeeping practices, the responsible use of crop protection products, the usage of personal protection equipment (PPE) and spraying techniques and the use of the mobile app Madhu Sandesh, which can be downloaded from the Google App store.

On lines of 'Swate Kranti' (white revolution), Government is now focusing on sweet revolution, mission to encourage farmers to take up beekeeping practices for income generation. The demand for honey and other value added products is huge globally, this gives an opportunity to explore and exploit the worldwide demand. Such high demand also lure sellers to resort to practices of mixing honey with corn syrup etc. to increase the quantity. Therefore as much there is a need for encouraging, it is equally important to train and make them aware of the consequences of such practices. Researchers at IIT Delhi are exploring ways to trace back the origin of honey and develop a transparent system to ensure its quality is maintained at every step of the supply chain from production to export. This will help obtain high premium quality honey and help the beekeepers and farmers earn better in the process.