

SOUTH SUDAN: The story of hope

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In April 2015, artisanal beekeepers in South Sudan's Central Equatoria State made 4 tons of 100% natural honey and shea butter their country's first export to the United States. This milestone trade was accomplished by the River Nile International Cooperative Society, Lulu Works and other local beekeepers.

Despite the challenge of working amidst a struggling economy and armed clashes between government and opposition forces, the South Sudanese beekeepers have reached markets in the USA and Uganda with assistance from their partners in Lone Star - Africa Works. Africa Works, an American company developing start-up businesses together with local entrepreneurs in South Sudan, also helped the beekeepers with essentials such as equipment, training, transport and storage.

Unique position

Africa Works believes that buyers are attracted to South Sudanese honey for several reasons:

- *It has a unique origin not only because it comes from the world's newest country, but because early analyses show many unknown pollen sources.*
- *No artificial chemicals are used on the bees or their floral sources, and the honey has tested negative for any trace of metals, toxins or other harmful contents.*
- *The honey is kept free from any extra sweetener or additives, so it is 100% pure.*
- *The honey is strained and stored using sanitary and food-safe equipment.*
- *In order to keep costs low and conserve local resources, the honey is harvested from wild hives, top bar hives, and traditional hives made from bamboo and tree bark.*

The best part about South Sudan's honey - especially honey from the Equatoria region - is its flavor. Not fed by the beekeepers, the bees are left to forage for nectar among a wide range of flora. The result is a fragrant honey tasting of citrus, spice and herb.



Africa Works Team with Beekeepers

The artisan beekeepers of the River Nile International are also producing a high-quality wax which they have begun selling to buyers in Uganda.

Looking ahead

Excited by this first sale of honey to the USA, South Sudan's beekeepers and Africa Works are confident about the future of South Sudan's honey industry. America might start to import more African honey, but more importantly, overall global demand for honey is rising. South Sudan can help supply not just neighboring markets in Kenya but also overseas markets, perhaps through regional companies like Honey Care Africa and African Beekeepers.

Productivity of the bees and logistics

Two of the biggest challenges are the productivity of the bees and logistics.

For now East Africa's honeybee population is incredibly productive, and shows a natural resistance to the parasites and pathogens devastating bees in other parts of the world. This includes

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the bees of South Sudan.

Beekeepers here must find a way to scale up production without “overstressing” the bees. In other countries beekeepers have weakened their bees’ natural resistance to pests like Varroa and Nosema, while exposing their bees to too many artificial chemicals - as a result, the bees are more vulnerable to environmental “shocks” whether an extreme temperature or the stress of being driven too long a distance.

Even though South Sudan’s bees are productive and floral sources are abundant, the other big challenge is the logistics of expanding production and connecting suppliers with the market. Buyers will not purchase honey if the cost is too high, and since most beekeepers in South Sudan are also farmers, they cannot afford to invest their time and labor in a product they cannot sell at a profit.

Transporting goods is expensive in places like South Sudan where the roads are degraded, the cost of fuel is high and import/export procedures are not streamlined. This means it is difficult to bring in equipment and export the finished product. For example, importing straining equipment and appropriate drums for exporting honey.

When producing this first shipment of honey and shea for the USA, South Sudan’s beekeepers had to make use of every available resource. Sometimes, this even meant letting the honey warm in the sun before pouring it through the strainers.

This logistics challenge is why although South Sudan’s artisanal beekeepers can be proud of making honey their first export to the USA, they should stay focused on local markets and regional buyers.

Important bee keys

Africa Works and their South Sudanese partner-beekeepers believe that beekeeping is more than just a viable business for farmers in South Sudan. It is also key to South Sudan’s economic

development and political stability.

First, there is no agriculture without a healthy bee population. This is why it’s important to create an economic incentive to take care of bees.

Second, beekeeping is a way to show investors and potential business partners that they can successfully invest in South Sudan’s cooperatives and agricultural sector - long neglected in favor of the country’s oil industry.

Third, beekeeping is a way for people in South Sudan to participate in the preservation of their history and culture. Traditional beekeeping as practiced for generations - using burning grass for smoke, hives made from bamboo and tree bark - can be used alongside imported methods - metal smokers, top bar hives and Langstroth “box” hives.

Fourth, beekeeping is a way to trade and interact across all ethnic, religious and national boundaries. Unlike oil, which is only found in some states, bees can be found almost everywhere. Unlike oil, everyone can enjoy honey. Even when the Africa Works team would be stopped at a police checkpoint - the ongoing conflict has led to heightened security measures - the armed soldiers would invite them to visit their farm to taste their honey.

Fifth, beekeeping is a means of self-empowerment. Using local materials and local methods, South Sudanese beekeepers can organize themselves into becoming part of a supply chain reaching markets even as far as 8,000 miles away in the USA.

Lastly, South Sudanese honey is a way to build up South Sudan’s “brand”. South Sudan’s beekeepers are creating high quality products like 100% pure honey and beeswax for the international market.. It is a way to show the world that South Sudan is a country of entrepreneurs, of people who want to grow their own food and their own businesses.