Beekeeping & Development

Todas and Honey Revival of Apis cerana

Special Issue from India
marketing of honey and bees wax

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Importance and Relevance

Marketing is fast becoming an integral part of many income generating projects. It assumes importance especially in today’s context as a means of becoming self-reliant. Also, income generating projects cannot be supported by funding agencies indefinitely if they do not turn into economically viable units. However, marketing in a development context is not easy. There are dilemmas that need to be addressed constantly. There is one definite limitation - it is not an end but a tool to achieve other important objectives. That makes the effort more challenging and interesting.

For development organisations, it is all the more a key responsibility as we have decided to make an intervention in the lives of producers. Most of them are small groups of artisans, tribal communities or farmers who are extremely vulnerable.

The Experience With Honey

Since our primary group was the honey gathering community, honey was the first product that we started with. Some of the crucial things we had to keep in mind - the community, their environment, conservation of habitat, skill and tradition and crucially, a fair deal for the primary collector.

Our initial effort was to explore the local market and build upon it. It gave us a few advantages:

- they understood the value of good quality honey
- we did not spend unnecessary money on logistics to try and sell the honey at faraway places

It is very crucial to understand that profit margins cannot be very high initially as we are moving low volumes and we cannot recover all our costs immediately.

A very important step that we took was going in for a bank funding for the project. It meant standing up to a rigorous scrutiny but also meant that the project could be an economically viable enterprise. Initially, there was a high amount of energy that had to be put into providing information about the honey (even today, the effort has to be on). The honey was different - in packaging, in taste and aroma. The crucial thing was that it was priced reasonably. Locally, we started attracting a regular group of customers who prefer this ‘different’ honey.

Bees Wax - Value Addition

There was no tradition of collection of bees wax after the honey was extracted. After realizing that they could get good prices for wax, the tribals brought this to us, too.

Here, value addition played a key role as we made different kinds of candles. This was an item where the supply was limited and had a high value. Though the candles were made, there were a number of problems that cropped up in quality control. Persistence in finding solutions at each step has ensured that candles give us an extremely high return. Today, the product is marketed as a niche product.

The few points below sum up the experience that we have gained over the past five years. However, the road doesn’t end here - it is a learning process continually.

Advantages

1. Can be more sensitive to market demands and changes
2. Response can be much faster

3. Adapt products to local tastes
4. Value addition to ensure higher returns
5. Unique products which can have a distinct identity

Disadvantages

1. Economies of scale are difficult
2. The intensity/amount of effort might not be justifiable - packaging, marketing, meeting local government regulations, etc
3. The overheads are too high
4. Failure of crop or disruptions in production and supply can effect consumer confidence
5. Impact of sophisticated technologies is not appropriate
6. Lacking standardization in most products
7. Danger of high/expensive inputs making products unmanageable

Steps to be kept in mind while undertaking income generating projects

- Clear focus on developing market oriented/led products
- Delineate potential customers
- Initial focus on local markets
- Adapt and innovate tools and processes for production
- Consistent and continuous supply
- Information dissemination on products/people/area