

AAA Business Bulletin

Product innovation & diversification for honey businesses

Keeping bees allows for a business to generate a number of profitable and useful products and services. Obviously, honey is the first product that comes to mind, but there are many more possibilities. For this reason, one of the objectives of the Honey CoP is to increase awareness of the potential of hive products and beekeeping related services to generate extra income and employment.

1. Hive products

Honey can be sold pure as a sweetener or medicine. You can produce specialty or certified honeys, sell it in its own pure honey comb, or extracted and mixed with fruits or nuts. Honey is also an ingredient for a large number of processed foods and drinks, such as cookies, honey beer and mead.

Beeswax is made by bees to form the combs the bees live on. Beeswax can be re-used or sold to other beekeepers to make new comb foundations, and is used in cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, candles, soaps and varnishes.

Propolis is a sticky mixture of resins the bees collect from plants, particularly from their leaf and flower buds, and beeswax. Propolis has numerous medicinal properties and is used in cosmetics and wood varnishes.

Bee pollen are the little pellets of pollen that bees bring in to their hives after foraging. Pollen is collected using special traps and is used as a protein rich dietary supplement. They are then frozen or dried to enable their conservation.

Royal jelly is a secretion that nurse bees make to feed young larvae and queens. It is harvested from queen cells and used as a dietary supplement.

Bee venom requires specialized equipment to harvest, and can only be harvested in a limited way from hives, but it has high value as an ingredient of medicinal products.

For more ideas and details on adding value to bee products, you may look into the 1996 FAO publication “Value added products from beekeeping”, also published on the AAA resource center.

2. Services and secondary products

Pollination services are of great interest to producers of many agricultural crops, as pollination by bees can increase production and productivity of numerous crops such as fruits, vegetables, tubers, seeds, nuts and coffee. The effect of bee pollination on crop productivity can be drastic.

Training & consultancies Companies or individuals experienced in beekeeping and production of hive products can find a source of employment and income by providing training and consultancies.

Production of equipment & tools As beekeeping becomes more popular, demand for specialized equipment and tools increases. Manufacturing beekeeping equipment and tools may provide a good business opportunity for some entrepreneurs.

Apitourism or beekeeping tourism is a relatively new phenomenon. It basically means that you open up (part of) your beekeeping farm or apiary to tourists. International beekeepers like to travel and learn from other beekeepers, and even non-beekeepers can be interested in an exotic bee-farm experience. Apitourism can be lucrative, but it requires different skills, including hospitality services.

3. Business potential

Each of the mentioned primary and secondary products and services have business potential, although production methods, processing requirements and markets differ greatly for each of them.

Primary products such as pollen, royal jelly and bee venom require more equipment and high value technology than honey, beeswax and propolis. Similarly, markets for pollination services, training and consultancies may still need to be created.

But even where business potential is at present small, the beekeeper household can still benefit domestically from many of these products and services. In the meantime, CoP members will continue to explore possible paths of innovation and diversification, and try to open up new markets.