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A bus driver masters the art of hiving wild honey bees

• M. J. PRABU



HELPFUL: Honey bees in a garden have been helping to get 30 to 40 per cent more yield. Photo; Special Arrangement

Udayan, a temporary bus driver with the Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) was finding it difficult to make both ends meet.

All agriculture universities across the country have Krishi Vigyan Kendras with them to reach out to the farmers and act as a bridge of knowledge transfer from the lab to the land and vice versa.

But in the present scenario, more than knowledge sharing or imparting, it is becoming increasingly important to help a farmer earn more, so that agriculture is sustainable both for himself and to the society at large.

Challenge

“It is not necessary for a farmer to own large areas of land to earn better income. In fact revenue generation is possible even from a few cents. To make it possible is both a challenge and an art which only few kendras have been able to achieve and one among them is the one attached to the Central Plantation and Crops Research Institute in Kasargod (CPCRI),” says Dr. T.S. Manoj Kumar Programme Coordinator.

Mr. Udayan, a temporary bus driver with the Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) was finding it difficult to make both ends meet as his monthly income was only around Rs. 8,000.

Maintaining a family of four in today’s economic situation is no easy task. His 60 cents of ancestral land is densely packed with diversified crops such as coconut palms, pepper, banana, betel leaf and different vegetables along with a milch cow.

Racking his brain as to how to earn some extra income he accidentally happened to read in the local dailies about training programmes on stingless bee keeping (Meliponiculture) being organized by the Kendra.

“Curious and excited he contacted us to explore the possibility of starting meliponiculture as a microenterprise since land was one of the major barriers in taking up agri enterprises involving cultivation of crops,” says Dr. Manoj.

Usually bee keeping means rearing bees with stings in wooden boxes and training is given on the art of handling the insects and honey extraction.

No easy task

Once completed the participants can collect the queen bee and the box paying a amount and start establishing the colonies in their field or garden.

But collecting bees from the wild called hiving is not so easy. It is an art which requires patience and skill and only some gain mastery over it.

Immediately after attending the training programme, Mr. Udayan started his venture with the confidence that he can practice hiving. He had noticed small bees going in and out of bamboo poles in a nearby forest land. He wanted to hive natural colonies from the forest areas and contacted a former trainee of the Kendra for help. He arranged bee boxes of standard specifications and started hiving natural colonies.

Enterprise

Together they initiated their enterprise with five colonies. They started locating colonies first by observing bees and later hiving it at weekly intervals. From their experience, they found that in large areas with wild vegetation, small bees prefer to colonise in dried bamboo poles as compared to hollows or cavities of wild trees.

“Now, they are able to collect five to seven colonies a week. At present, there are around 95 colonies in their unit. They have sold 65 colonies at Rs.1200 per colony and around 25 kg of honey at rate of Rs.1,500 per kg thereby earning Rs.1,15,000 in the last six months,” explains Dr. S. Leena, Chief technical officer.

The honey is marketed under brand name called Unique honey and is quite popular since it is extracted from from stingless bees (also called dammer bees) is natural and medicinal in quality.

Their duo’s success of hiving bees from the wild was widely reported in local media which inspired several youth in the region to approach the Kendra for similar training.

“Kasaragod has been declared an organic district by the government and under organic cultivation; initially it takes three to four years for the yields to stabilise. The only way to encourage better yield is by raising honeybees. It has been recorded by us that honey bees in a garden have been helping to get 30 to 40 per cent more yield over a period of time,” explains Dr. Leena.

Proposal

The Karadka panchayath has submitted proposal for a project on creating honey village with the objective of establishing one colony in every homes which is a similar idea like every home must grow a sapling.

To know more about this interested readers can call Mr. Udayan, Panoor kochi house, Karaduka P.O., Muliya (via), Kasaragod 671 542, mobile: 8547994801 and Dr. S. Leena, Chief Technical Officer (Entomology), mobile: 09446062182, phone: 04994-232993.

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