



Okello inspects his beehives. Below he shows off his honey product. PHOTOS TOBBIAS JOLLY

Okello tasting sweet money from honey

Though James Okello, loved the teaching profession, his calling lay somewhere in farming. He discovered the dream and right away ditched the chalk. Today Okello has made a fortune in apiary and is one of the most successful beekeepers in Uganda, writes **TOBBIAS JOLLY OWINY.**

He is a man from the classroom; however James Okello Alele put his thoughts together and went back to his village to start keeping bees since chalk work was not yielding fruits any longer.

At the moment, Okello's Akilo apiculture farm located at Ogur trading centre, 27 kilometres north of Lira town along Kitgum Road, boasts of a total 168 beehives, a honey processing plant, 30 cows, coffee, eucalyptus woodlot and goats.

At the entry into his home, a disclaimer which reads; 'do not make unnecessary noise, bees are busy' reminds one that bees do well in a silent environment, exactly what his home is.

Okello 60 revealed on Monday that he has discovered a goldmine in adding value to honey.

"I get a gross average of Shs8.5m to Shs10m per month from the bee keeping project," he said.

CHALLENGES

Much as he reaps big from the enterprise, Okello faces a number of challenges.

He cites unscrupulous farmers who produce poor quality honey as the biggest threat to the business.

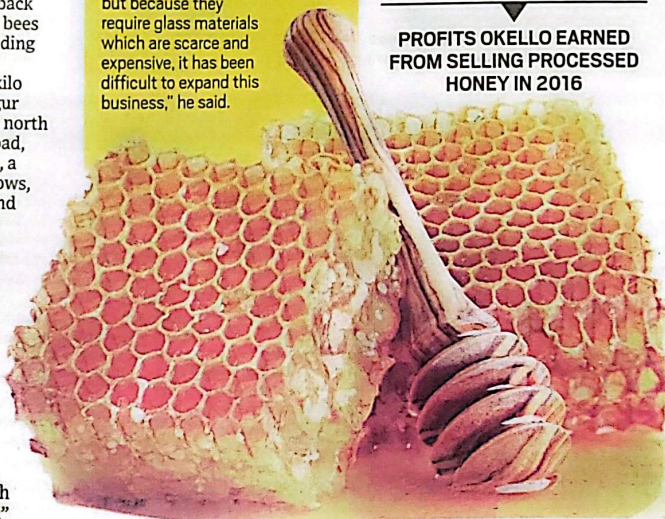
According to Okello, the adulterated honey sells cheaply on the market and brings along consequences which directly affects the brand.

"My vision is to compete in the regional market of East Africa but because they require glass materials which are scarce and expensive, it has been difficult to expand this business," he said.



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PROFITS OKELLO EARNED FROM SELLING PROCESSED HONEY IN 2016



How he started

"What I got from class could not allow ends meet 10 years ago because three of my 12 children needed to go to institutions of higher learning I baked an idea to invest in bee keeping so that I can earn from it to educate my children," he said.

The Church of Uganda in 2007 came up with a project to support bee farmers, a factor that prompted him to register and get seven bee hives to start.

It was not easy at the beginning since he needed to balance between farm work and classes.

"That year I fetched Shs600,000 from honey sales. Half of the money was spent on restocking with the balance paying tuition for my children."

However his income projection was not yet coming as he expected, this made him register his enterprise with Naads a year later as a CBO with 25 other bee keepers.

He says after forming a

group, it became easier for them to look for better markets.

"We received training from Naads. After the training, we were appointed to train other prospective farmers and in return I was paid Shs6.5m. This was my turning point for I invested the money in my beehive project," he said.

Using the money, he bought a motorcycle to help him mobilise bee keepers, look for market as well as expand land and buy 30 modern bee hives and metallic stands.

Innovation, value addition

After realising a profit of Shs35m at the end of 2015, Okello says he needed to shift to another level in bee keeping and honey business.

"Several field visits to central and western region to bee keepers opened my eyes and made me realise that I was losing a lot of money in selling raw honey. I then invested in a honey press that cost me Sh3m and other equipment totaling to Shs5m," he said.

Using the new equipment, no part of his products would be thrown away as wastes.

"We now extract the honey, grade and package them into classes before sell. We use the wax for making candles, this significantly doubled my earnings from bee keeping," he noted.

According to his records, Okello earned a gross income of Sh113m from the project in 2016 which he used to establish other enterprises.

"My profits were big compared to 2015 when I earned only Shs35m as gross income. The money I got last year has helped me to put up a new permanent structure at Sh50m, buy cows and introduce two acres of banana and coffee plantation combined," he said.

Market

Okello says he has readily available market for the products and that on several occasions he is overwhelmed by the demand.

"Golden Bee and Natural Bee companies in Kampala are some of my clients. I also supply supermarkets in Lira town, Jinja, Kampala that provides my biggest share of the market as well as in South Sudan," he said.

A kilogramme of processed and packed pure honey costs Shs20,000, while a five-litre jerrycan goes for Shs100,000.

Vision

Akilo apiculture farm now employs six people who attend to the apiary.

"I pay each of these workers Shs100,000 per month and the earning has had a great impact on their lives," he narrated.

Okello revealed that he has been able to settle tuition of his children, build a new home, drill a borehole as well as establish a coffee plantation and livestock.

He said that he now plans to establish an apiculture demonstration unit at the farm to train prospective bee farmers in Lira District.

"I drilled a borehole and my plan is to grow crops in the dry season through irrigation whose flowers can provide forage to bees throughout," he noted.