

By Herbert Musoke

Bees are one of the most critical agricultural inputs, yet they are neglected, causing countless losses and destruction of the ecosystem.

Herbert Mugisha, the executive director of Green Cane Innovations Ltd, highlights that bees and other pollinators are critical to human survival and environmental health due to their essential role in pollination.

"Bees and pollinators provide essential, natural services free of charge. Without them, both life and livelihoods would collapse. This is because about 70% to 80% of our food – especially fruits and vegetables – relies directly on pollination. So, without pollinators, we cannot survive," he explains.

However, these pollinators and the bees are facing extinction. Their populations are decreasing every day due to habitat loss from deforestation, increased use of indiscriminate chemicals and pollution.

"There is a need to make deliberate efforts to ensure these pollinators are saved. By saving them, we save the world," Mugisha says.

BEES AS AGRICULTURAL INPUTS Mugisha says, unfortunately, when it comes to inputs, people only look at seeds, irrigation, fertilisers and pesticides, among others and forget extremely critical pollinators.

"Therefore, there is a need to focus on creating awareness that pollination should be considered as an agro-input," he stressed.

Most farmers have neglected this in their planning. For example, if you are a coffee farmer, it is imperative that you have bees on your farm for pollination because there is scientific evidence that insect-pollinated coffee has higher fruit setting. This is because pollination helps prevent flower abortion in the coffee.

"Once your coffee starts flowering and the flowers are pollinated, they become stronger, leading to more fruit setting," Mugisha says.

Insect-pollinated coffee, specifically that pollinated by honey bees, is said to have berries that ripen uniformly, which simplifies harvesting for the farmer, enhances quality, thereby increasing the coffee flavour profile.

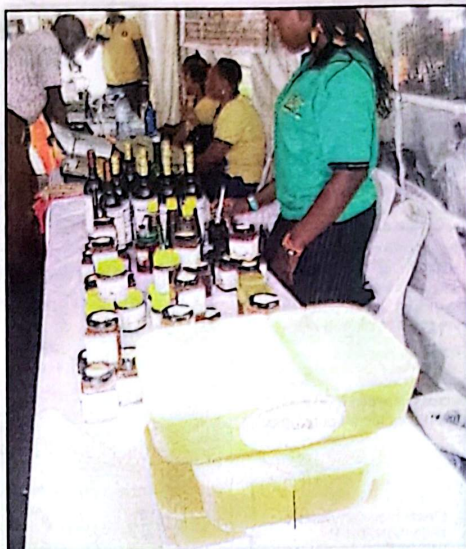
"Because uniform bean sizes and enhanced aromatic quality make clear economic sense, farmers should factor pollination services into their seasonal agro-input planning. What began as a 'save the bees' initiative has

TREAT BEES AS A FARM SUPPORT INPUT

PHOTOS BY HERBERT MUSOKE



A farmer caring for his bee hives



Beekeepers showcasing bee products during the Harvest Money Expo



Herbert Mugisha

now evolved into a structured national pollinator economy framework," he adds.

This proves to the world that pollination brings economic benefits to households, farmers, communities and the country.

EARNING FROM BEEKEEPING Osuman Mwebe, a beekeeper at Kamusogonya-Butoolo

village, Kamengo sub-county in Mpigi district, has a variety of hives that give him business sustainability. Each variety has a different harvest time and yields different volumes.

Mwebe explains that Kenya Top Base hives (KTBs) are harvested after six months and yield five to eight litres of honey. Tanzania Top Base hives (TTBs) are also harvested after six months and yield eight to 10 litres of honey. Langstroth are harvested after three months, yielding eight to 10 litres of honey.

"A well-processed litre of honey goes for sh30,000. When you add value to your honey, you get between sh400,000 and sh500,000 from one litre of honey," he says.

For example, from two litres

of honey mixed with Bee venom, Mwebe gets three 600ml bottles, selling each at sh350,000. From the same, he gets two 900ml bottles, each selling at sh400,000. This means that from the two litres of honey that would fetch only sh60,000, he gets sh1,050,000 and sh800,000 respectively. For processed beeswax, a

bar that weighs 1kg is sold at sh30,000.

According to Mwebe, every 10 litres of honey yields between 1.5 and 2kg of beeswax, alongside a quarter-kilogramme of propolis, which sells for sh80,000.

WORLD BEES CELEBRATIONS Mugisha explains that the

save the bees campaign hinges on three pillars – pollination for agricultural productivity, pollination for biodiversity and ecosystem regeneration and pollination for livelihood.

"So, as we celebrate World Bee Day, let us remind our ourselves that pollination is critical for our livelihood."

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