

EKUDO SQUEEZES MONEY OUT OF BEES

For the fourth year running, Vision Group together with the Embassy of the Netherlands, KLM Airlines, dfcu Bank and Koudjia Animal Nutrition, is running the best farmers' competition. The 2018 competition will run from February to November, with the awards in December. Every week, Vision Group platforms will publish profiles of the farmers. Winners will walk away with sh150m and a fully paid-for trip to the Netherlands

By Moses Nampala and Justus Akol

There is a buzz near my ear as a bee whizzes past. This is at an apiary belonging to Silas Ekudo, who fell in love with bees, which are his cash cows.

All this work started 13 years ago. "It only takes buying beehives, put them in a wilderness, then fold your arms across your chest, patiently waiting for eight months to elapse and begin to earn money," a facilitator from Self Help Africa, a poverty alleviation non-government organisation stated with such simplicity, during a two week beekeeping induction workshop.

The statement would become, an inspiring tool to deliver 36-year-old Ekudo from Kaue village in Bukedea district, to become one of the successful bee-keeping model farmers in eastern region.

According to Self Help Africa, which promotes bee-keeping in eastern region, majority of bee-farmers have apiaries with an average of 50 beehives.

Today Ekudo has of 98 beehives on one acre of land capable of yielding 1,110 kg of honey every eight months.

Ekudo is a trained metal fabricator, from Busitema University. He is the chairperson of Bukedea Honey Producers and Processors Association (BUHOPPA).

"We go to school to get knowledge, but not jobs. I got knowledge and this is why I am able to practise things that are outside what I studied," Ekudo says.

Some of the products from the farm include honey, jelly, propolis, sunflower oil, beehives, smokers and honey harvesting gear.

Started the farm
Ekudo started the farm in 2005 after getting training from Self Help Africa, an NGO empowering farmers in aspects of farming as a business and value addition.

He also started making beehives out of reeds, broken pots and later graduated to KTB and Langstroth beehives which he makes.

"Beekeeping becomes easier if you learn how to make your own hives. It also becomes cheaper if capture your own swarms," he says.

To make his own hives, Ekudo had to commit sh245,000 to buy samples of KTB (Kenya Top bar) and Langstroth bee-hives at sh95,000 and sh150,000 respectively.

"I bought the two sample bee-hives to scrutinise each thoroughly, grasp the workmanship skills and thereafter make them on my own," he recalls.

First harvest
Although the facilitators had indicated that a



farmer can harvest honey after eight months. Ekudo waited for 13 months.

He thought that deferring the harvest for more months would, scale up the volume of honey he would harvest. He harvested 10kg from each of the 40 KTB hives and about 18kg from eight Langstroth beehives. In total, he had 544kg. Selling each kilo at sh15,000, he earned sh81m.

After the first harvest, Ekudo used part of the proceeds to buy materials to make more hives.

"I made one Langstroth beehive and 20 KTB beehives. This increased the number of hives in the apiary to 69," Ekudo says.

The second harvest came in February 2007. Ekudo got 762kg and total gross earnings were about sh114m.

Last harvest in 2017
Collecting about 10kg of honey from each of the 84 KTB hives, Ekudo harvested 840kg. From the 15 Langstroth beehives, he realised 270kg, making a total of 1,110kg. These earned him sh24m.

Preparing to harvest
During the harvest season, Ekudo hires 10 people.

The harvest season lasts for about two weeks. Harvesting is usually done at 11:00pm-3:00am.

"We do it at night because bees are calm at that time," he says.

During harvest, Ekudo and his team wear protective gear, which constitutes overalls, head gear, elbow length gloves and gumboots. Other items that an individual participating in the harvest process would have are a special brush, smoker, a knife and a pail.

SOCIAL IMPACT

Ekudo employs casual labourers who are paid according to available work like

... of sunflower and cassava.

... in Ilinda and across



Ekudo and wife displaying some of their products which include honey

The last honey harvest in 2017 earned Ekudo shh24m

"One person is capable of harvesting honey from only three hives each night," Ekudo explains.

During the harvest, Ekudo explains, the combs are extracted from the beehives.

"You have to use the special brush to wipe off the bees before stashing the honey comb in a pail," he adds.

Processing honey

"All the dark-coloured combs are put in the same pails and the cream ones in another. A farmer has to poke repeatedly in the utensil that contains the unprocessed honeycomb, using a clean piece of stick," Ekudo explains.

The poking is done to allow honey to sip out of the combs.

The unprocessed honey mixed with crumbs of combs is then put in a honey press. The press squeezes the marsh, allowing only honey out.

After using the press, a farmer stie the honey again into an aluminium tank.

Honey is then left in the tank for five days for the sediment to settle at the bottom.

Ekudo's honey clientele includes local honey dealers and honey exporting firms in Kampala and Lira.

Obtaining wax

Ekudo's wife, 30-year-old Stella Akol, explains that once honey has been squeezed out of the

... residues are put in a big container

... residue The

gone into the apiary and provoked the bees. "Such rare instances have seen angry insects going on rampage around the village," Ekudo says. He has since hired watchmen to restrict access to the apiary.

"The harvest season comes with many chores, especially the processing bit that requires my presence," he says.

It is usually advisable, not to engage in livestock rearing, when undertaking a beekeeping enterprise.

"I desperately want to rear goats and cows but I can not go against

the precaution," he observes.

Mistakes "Bees have strange traits. They always look for honey during the dry season. When this rainy season sets in, they spend most of their time in the hive feeding on what they collected during the dry

season. One he was tempted to harvest honey during the rainy season, but had to defer the chore.

"I found the beehive almost empty. I had to suspend the harvest exercise until two months later. Surprisingly there was abundant

Wax from Ekudo's farm

What others say

Stella Akol, Ekudo's wife

I am the farm assistant manager. There is nothing done in this farm without my involvement. I make candles using the wax from our farm. I also participate in honey harvesting because my husband trained me. In his absence I run the farm normally. This farm has enabled us to educate our children and we are able to grow other food crops

from his shop. I



Hands on: Ekudo processing honey from his apiary. Photos by Moses Nampala



Products from bees

Among the most important products obtained from bee is honey, which is a food value as well as medicinal. Honey has always been a variable in manufacturing of cough syrup (linctus) in pharmacies.

Other values of products of bees include, wax, that is used in laboratories and making of candle wax.

According to Aryodi Bee product export firm, that are the main clients of Ekudo's wax is crucial in the pharmaceutical industry. Aryodi is owned by Robert Okodia, one of the best farmers in 2015.

"Most of our clients overseas are pharmaceutical firms," Okodia says.

the farm instead of looking for loans," he says.

Post-harvest management

Ekudo has a store and a showroom for his honey at the Bukedea town.

He has a honey setting tank for processing honey, weighing scales, packaging container and branding materials. This guarantees the quality and safety of honey.

Bookkeeping

"Records are the veins that move the blood of the business around," he says.

At his farm, Receipt books, beehives records, among others, are kept. Supply notes, basing on orders from local governments to supply beehives, smokers keep him to be on top of the business.

Achievements

The biggest achievement that Ekudo has realised from beekeeping enterprise has been acquisition of property.

"I have bought a total of 33 acres of land since I started keeping bees in 2005," he observes.

Acquiring such an expansive piece of land has seen him engage in other farming enterprises.

"I have decided to utilise 10 out the 33 acres of land to grow sunflower, which I supply to Mukwano," he observes.

Ekudo has bought prime land in Bukedea trading centre, where he has since established hardware shop and a metal workshop.

The enterprise has enabled him to construct a permanent house at Kaue village.

He is currently undertaking an agro forestry project on five acres of land.

The beekeeping enterprise has created him yet another income generating project.

"Organisations from different parts of the country are now hiring me to make them beehives for their clients," he says with a hearty laughter.

Knowledge

Ekudo has acquired the knowledge through workshops and interactions with other farmers.

In 2015, Ekudo participated in The National Apiary award week and the honey trade show. He was voted the best in eastern Uganda and got sh1m.

He has learnt how to add value to other bee products, for example, producing candles.

"Since I trained as a metal fabricator at Busitema, I use this knowledge to make my own candle making machines," he says.

Ekudo also downloads information on beekeeping from the Internet. He also reads newspapers like *Itop* and *New Vision*, listens to radio to enhance his knowledge.

"I am also invited to facilitate at different

TIPS & TRICKS

Before setting up a bee farm

Ekudo who has helped other farmers across the country to undertake keeping bees, says not every part of this country is endowed with bees.

"I may not now the natural factors, but some areas of this country are endowed with few bees while other areas have abundant swarms," Ekudo says.

Ekudo explains in most areas where the bees are few, bee-keeping has not been lucrative, as the returns in terms of honey are minimal.

"For anybody to undertake the bee-enterprise it would prudent enough to know the nature of his surroundings, is it naturally endowed with so much bees? The more the bees the more the chances of a farmer reaping big from the enterprise," he cautions.

Ekudo says it is important for one to establish an apiary away from households because bees are not only emotional, but violent when provoked.

He observes that part from a farmer having the means to source hives and setting them up in the apiary there is virtually nothing he/she is obliged to do other than waiting for the right time to harvest.

Bees and water

Apart from a farmer buying hives and setting them into an apiary, factors that attract bees in a given area are natural.

In the case of Ekudo, while it is true that bees require a lot of water, he does not think.

However, geographically Bukedea district lies on peripheral of one of the Lake Kyoga arms. The natural water body (arm of Lake Kyoga) is barely 2km away from his home.

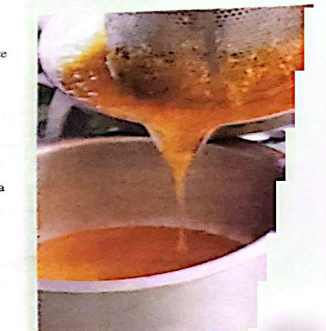
Expenses

It is the beginning that seem to be hard as a farmer has to buy beehives. A KTB hive goes for sh95.0 while a Langstroth one costs sh150,000 respect

The honey processing equipment Ekudo has used for more than a decade include honey press cost sh2m.

The protective gear he acquired in the beginning cost about sh400,000. Ekudo currently makes

Apart from the harvest season where he w about 10 people. He has a permanent labourer three people whom he pays sh450,000.



Processing honey from combs

FRAUD A

Do not be duped! Enterin competition is free-of-ol are facilitated to w The winners are not che but by a panel of dis integrity. If anyone as to feature in the comp