BEEKEEPING IN SWAZILAND

Swaziland apiculture situation paper presented during ApiExpo Africa 2014, Zimabwe

by Thembinkosi Ndlangamandla, Email: ***tndla14@yahoo.com***

[October 2014]

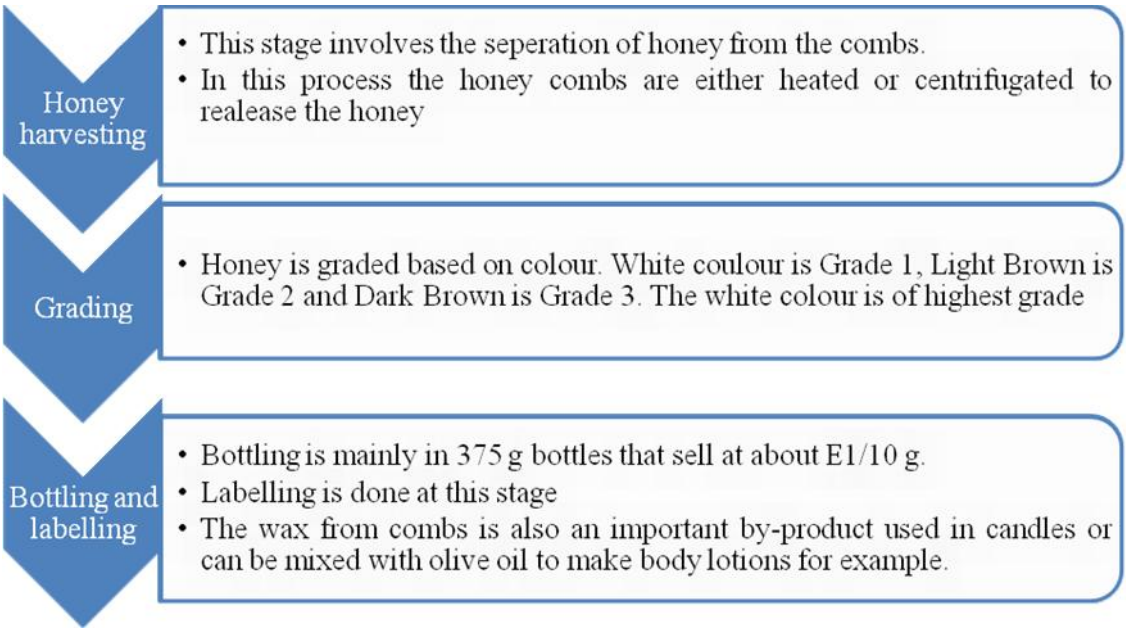
1. Introduction

Honey hunting in Swaziland has been a long standing culture. This practice is prevalent mostly during the winter months when wild bee-colonies produce a lot of honey. Honey in Swaziland is produced under natural conditions using local honey bees, the *Apis mellifera adansoni* and *Apis mellifera scutallat*, natural forests, eucalyptus forests, citrus plantations and field crops. The bee lifecycle follow three stages which are the following: the Swarming stage (February to April), the Honey Flow Stage (April to August) and the Dead Stage (August to February).

1.1 Honey production in Swaziland

Local production of honey is based on organic principles which avoid pesticides and is extracted under hygienic conditions with limited use of heating system. It is mainly strained using gravitational force and is allowed to set before being packed in customer desired containers as illustrated in figure 1 below.

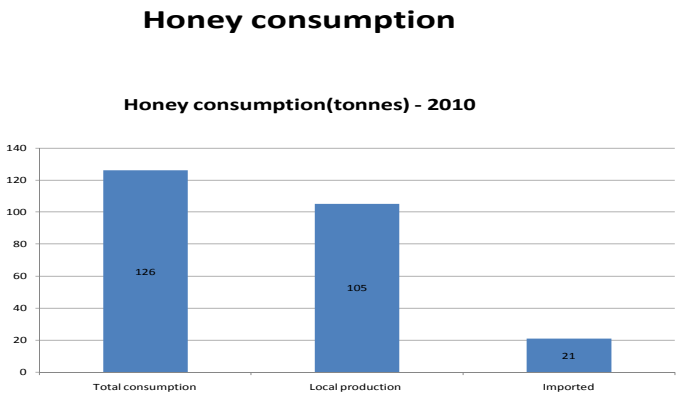
Figure 1: Honey production steps in Swaziland



In 2010 there were around 1107 bee-keepers in Swaziland with a total of 3860 bee hives.

The 2010 honey production and consumption status in the country is shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Honey production and consumption in Swaziland



At present, honey bee farming is progressively being transformed from subsistence to a commercial level. Consequently, it has developed sub-industries such as manufacturing of hives, bee-keeping equipment, honey, pollen and propolis production, queen rearing and swarm production, crop pollination and honey-bee product processing.

There are currently two main companies undertaking honey extraction/processing and these are Eswatini Kitchen and Bulembu Ministries. On average, 40% of the honey in Swaziland is sold through the formal markets whilst 60% was sold through the informal market.

1.2 The bee industry developing body

In 2008, the Swaziland Honey Council was formed and its main aim was to lobby government to formulate a policy and enact appropriate legislation to develop and regulate the honey bee industry. The Council is also expected to lobby foreign governments and institutions for possible synergies and technical assistance for the establishment and sustenance of surveillance of pests and disease programmes. The Council's function is also the promotion of honey bee product markets and it also paves ways for phyto-sanitary measures and assists honey producers to meet national, regional and international honey bee standards. Swaziland is a member of the SADC Honey Council.

1.2 Key Interventions

1.2.1 Enabling environment

The Government of Swaziland fully support beekeeping as potential industry that will reduce rural poverty. Trainings of farmers and extension workers are ongoing with the help of NGOs

and other development partners. The honey council has been established to direct all activities that promote beekeeping in the country. As part of the national diversification strategy the country's diversification strategy also support beekeeping as a viable farming enterprise. The MOA is also committed to reduce disease prevalence of livestock, including those of bees.

Various legislations and policies are in place to support beekeeping and value addition in the industry. These include the National Development Strategy which some of its key aim is to reduce poverty and the Animal Disease Act of 1965 which provide a framework for promotion of livestock health and economic contribution he National Development Strategy.

1.2.2 Honey production Input supplies

Inputs for honey production consist of hives, protective clothing, bee smokers, hive tool and bee brushes. There are local supplies of these inputs and the prices are as follows: Bee Suite – E800.00, Bee Smoker – E450.00, PVC Gloves – E120.00, Water proof Boots – E128.00, Hives – Topbar hive – E500.00; Langstroth hive – E850.00 and Hive tool – E60.00

These inputs can have a lifespan of up to 10 years if well kept. Some of these inputs are cheap and are manufactured locally. These include the protective wear, the hives and hive tools.

1.3 Constraint

1.3.1 Input supplies

These inputs supplies, even though they are relatively not expensive, might be prohibitive for the rural poor.

1.3.2 Honey Production- Challenges

Many producers produce for the informal market because those offer a higher price. Threat of bee diseases[1] affects honey production and trade. There is also a risk of destruction of hives by forest fires and theft of hives.

Policies and legislations that guide honey production and trade in the country are due for a review. There is a need to increase extension services on honey production. Insufficient funds and inadequate bee extension officers limit surveillance for bee diseases. It is difficult to gather regular data on farmers who produce honey since these work as dispersed groups who rely on informal markets for their produce. Collection of honey from farmers to processors is based on honey availability information from farmers.

[1] Bee diseases of concern are mainly American Foul Brood, European Foul Brood, Varroa mites, Tracheal mite, Small and Large beetles and Nosema. Only the American and European Foul Brood are reportable and notifiable bee disease under the OIE and these have a potential to hinder international trade in honey. In 2008 Swaziland conducted a survey on these notifiable diseases and they were not found to be present in the country.

Honey production is not market led and the dominance of the informal sector result in poor market information and market structure for honey in the country.

1.4 Proposed future interventions

Establishment of market demand plan for bee inputs and devising strategies for their local production could be an important intervention. Educational campaigns will be enforced on bee keeping and potential farmers will be supported with inputs. Farmers will also be encouraged and helped to form honey groups so that they can benefit from bulk collection of honey from farmers to processors which greatly reduce transport costs, both for inputs and for their produce.

The honey council of Swaziland which is a key actor in promoting honey production will be given the necessary support and increase its effectiveness in promoting honey production in the country.

Honey demand will be increased through competitive affordable prices and diversifying honey products. Demand will also be strengthened through quality and standards assurance measures.

1.5 Conclusion

Local honey produced must be competitive with that produced in foreign markets. This competitiveness must be in terms of quality and price to ensure that all the honey produced and processed in the country is sold.