

5 HONEY PRODUCTION AND MARKETING

ETHIOPIA IS THE LARGEST HONEY PRODUCER IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, PRODUCING ON AVERAGE 45,000 METRIC TONNES (MT) OF RAW HONEY ANNUALLY.

Tigray accounts for approximately 10% of this production, and is known for its speciality white honey.

The regional government has prioritised honey as a strategic enterprise, classifying more than 70% of the 34 woredas in the region as “honey clusters”, earmarking honey enterprises for strategic funding and support. Honey is not a new product in Tigray, beekeepers continue to use traditional beekeeping technology, which only produce a third of what a modern hives can produce.



“I believe I have set a good example to my community” – Mulugeta Gebereyohanes

Forty-year-old Mulugeta Gebreyohanes lives in Sero kebele in Ahferom Woreda with his wife and four children. “My parent’s piece of land was too small and almost unproductive. I was so desperate that I fled to Saudi Arabia in 2011, but was soon imprisoned for being an illegal immigrant. I came back from Saudi Arabia empty-handed after one and a half years. I was enthusiastic [about taking part in the project] because the area is suitable for beekeeping and I know how profitable it can be. I was provided with two modern beehives and two bee colonies. I also participated in a three-day training on modern methods of beekeeping, and we even got to join experience sharing visits between beekeepers so we could learn from each other.”

“I have bred eight colonies, three of which I sold for about ETB 4,000 (approximately £136). I have benefitted a lot from the sale of honey, harvesting 40 kilos from each beehive. I have bought a good cow from the sale of honey, and am now able, for the first time, to give my children both honey and milk. I can now afford to buy fertiliser and got a better harvest from the very small plot land that I cultivate. I am saving ETB 50 (about £1.70) each month in a credit and saving association in our kebele which has 900 members. To be honest, I could have migrated to one of the Arab countries for a second time if Farm Africa had not intervened.”

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE FOR IMPROVED FOOD SECURITY IN TIGRAY, ETHIOPIA

Land in Tigray’s rugged mountains is scarce, and many farm sizes are very small. Many women, especially widows, and young people who have little access to land struggle to produce enough to feed their families. With funding from Irish Aid and the UK Department for International Development, Farm Africa worked directly with nearly 6,400 women and landless young people in Tigray’s Ahferom woreda, providing them with the knowledge and skills to successfully bolster their food security and incomes through farming and rearing livestock.

This booklet is one of a series of six focusing on each of the project’s key components:

1. Integrated watershed management
2. Fruit and vegetable production
3. Poultry production
4. Goat and sheep rearing
5. Honey production and marketing
6. Small-scale irrigation



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FARM AFRICA'S ACHIEVEMENTS

Farm Africa promoted the use of modern hives by supplying 540 local farmers with a beekeeping kit (two hives, two bee colonies and 4kg of wax plus accessories) alongside training in how to effectively use their new equipment. Farmers were selected by the government-mandated Community Care Coalition Committees. The committee targeted 'the poorest of the poor', namely people struggling with relative landlessness and unemployment; a group disproportionately made up of young people and women.

Most of the farmers engaged in beekeeping had little or no land of their own, but were able to keep their beehives on community land assigned for this purpose. Where

the hives were situated at or close to restored watersheds, beekeepers benefited from significantly improved productivity. After restoration of a nearby watershed, Ato Gebre Kidane of Mysuru kebele managed to double his number of hives from income gained through improved honey productivity.

Farmers who participated in the project earned an average of ETB 2,460 (about £88) per hive per year. Prices of the different varieties of honey vary, depending on the type of beehive used, with white honey produced in modern hives fetching the highest price.



Farm Africa / Nichole Sobbecki

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Typically, the beekeepers sold their honey to local consumers and traders.

The average amount of honey produced per household was less than 100kg, with on average some 80% of that being marketed and the remaining 20% consumed by the beekeepers and their families. Although output was found to be close to the national average, the Tigray beekeepers have not yet attained average quality of their product. For those engaged in beekeeping in Ahferom Woreda, honey constituted some 29% of their total income, only outstripped by casual labour, which highlights the lack of other income-generating opportunities they faced.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

The honey market in Tigray remains buoyant, and our study of the honey value chain identified three main processors (Dimma honey, the Melesse Cooperative Union and a factory in Makelle) who aggregate and sell honey to other wholesalers and retailers.

Processors clean, heat and package the honey, which is essential to ensuring consistency of quality and a longer shelf life for transportation and marketing. Processing businesses are growing: Dimma's volumes increased from 30MT in 2012 to 45MT in 2015. Despite exports of honey increasing,

traders report that they lack the product quality to penetrate lucrative international markets and are looking for new suppliers to help meet this demand. Prices continue to rise locally, across all varieties, further demonstrating the existence of unmet demand.

BENEFITS OF HONEY PRODUCTION IN TIGRAY

- ✓ There is growing demand for honey nationally.
- ✓ The area produces high-value white honey.
- ✓ Honey production is a key priority area for the Ethiopian government.
- ✓ Honey producers are now achieving good yields, especially when using the modern hives.
- ✓ Beekeepers can generate good income from honey production, making ETB 2,460 (£88) per hive.



CHALLENGES

The Tigrayan honey market is yet to reach full maturity. A number of critical challenges need to be addressed for the sector to reach its full potential in terms of creating development opportunities for the local community.

QUALITY

Even with basic extraction done using centrifuges, some provided by Farm Africa, residue and impurities in the raw honey lead to low quality. Wider access to centrifuges and training in sanitary procedures will help to solve quality issues.

POST-HARVEST HANDLING

Some traders reportedly add sugar or ripe bananas to the honey to increase its weight. One honey processor has begun using mobile testing equipment

during market days, making it more difficult for traders to do this. Training in post-harvest handling and farming as a business should help to reduce fraudulent activity and improve product quality.

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS GAP

Beekeepers in Ahferom Woreda lack the skills and knowledge to successfully manage modern beehives. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that official extension officers have limited capacity or expertise to close this skills gap. Partnerships with input providers could help improve farmers' capacity, spur technology uptake and spread the burden of extension.

EQUIPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

Access to quality tools and safety equipment, such as veils, smokers,

gum boots and extractors, was identified by 75% of beekeepers as their main constraint.

QUANTITY

As is typical for small-scale producers, beekeepers keep only a few hives and sell honey in small amounts, making their individual enterprises less cost-effective. Aggregating production to increase volume levels could unlock access to larger buyers, increasing producers' bargaining leverage and lowering marketing costs.

AGGREGATION

There is an extremely low level of cooperation among honey producers. Our survey revealed that only 25% of all honey producers in Ahferom belonged to any sort of farmer group.

INCREASED INVESTMENT

More investment in technology, training and awareness building is needed to improve the quality of honey produced in Tigray. Where this involves a financing gap, future programmes could experiment with innovative finance schemes for smallholder farmers, including village saving and loan associations, saving and credit cooperatives and advanced finance from other actors working across the honey value chain.

GREATER COORDINATION

Greater coordination amongst farmers is needed to secure greater volumes for the market and to make training and outreach easier.

IMPROVED PARTNERSHIPS AND SCALING UP

More needs to be done to strengthen the training and support beekeepers receive in both honey production and marketing their product. The investment by the regional government in additional development agents for beekeeping is a welcome development, as are efforts in Makelle University to build capacity. We recommend that agricultural extension efforts are paired with market engagement efforts. The role of the Farmer Training Centre in meeting Global Agriculture Standards should also be explored.

AGGREGATION

The challenge of aggregation is easily addressed. When probed on the matter, farmers revealed that they were willing to cooperate more closely in groups, but had not had the opportunity presented to them, or the benefits explained. In terms of the honey processors needing to access more honey, and the need to cut down on running costs such as transport and testing, there are clear benefits to be gained from organising honey farmers into groups. This could also help them to access finance to invest in expansion, more hives, or any additional technology they need, especially if they have advance contracting from the processors in place.

RESTORING WATERSHEDS, IMPROVING PRODUCTION

Finally, more awareness is needed on the link between improved honey productivity and the restored watershed, and ideally a more rigorous evaluation to generate a solid evidence base.



“I don’t own any land, but with the two beehives I received from Farm Africa I have been able to buy my family a bed and improve our nutrition.”

“I have harvested 25kg and recently another 35kg of quality honey. With the money I have bought another two hives to increase my productivity. I was also able to ensure my family has enough to eat. I plan to expand to 10 colonies especially as the honey price is stable.”

– Gebremeskell Gebretsadik

FARM AFRICA

Investing in smallholder farming is the number one way to combat poverty in rural Africa. Farm Africa is a leading NGO specialising in growing agriculture, protecting the environment and developing businesses in rural Africa.



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