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At the age of 24 years, Stefano Kileo is already a force to reckon with in as far as beekeeping is concerned.



He developed the love for beekeeping even before graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Animal Science Degree from Sokoine University of Agriculture (Sua) in 2019. Upon graduating, he had to hit the ground running in an effort to utilize his university education to transform beekeeping into a viable commercial project. So even as he tried to venture into poultry farming at one point while still studying, his aim was to earn an income to sustain himself.

But after getting more knowledge on commercial beekeeping from experienced people in the field, he had no time to waste.

Two years down the lane, he has a lot to tell regarding how the business has progressed. He says beekeeping was among the sub-sectors that have vast opportunities, but many farmers have not yet decided to transform it into commercial size.

Tabling the budget for his ministry for the financial year 2021/2022 a few days ago, Natural Resources and Tourism minister, Dr Damas Ndumbaro said Tanzania exported a total of 260 tonnes of honey worth Sh1.2 billion during the financial year 2016/2017. This however rose to 5,232 tonnes worth over Sh37.6 billion during the first ten months of the 2020/21 financial year.

The National Beekeeping Research Master Plan I, which covers the period between 2020 to 2030, targets to commercialize the sector and raise production of bee products to about 138,000 metric tonnes of honey and 9,200 metric tonnes of beeswax per annum. Apart from honey and beeswax, beekeeping also produces several other high-value by-products such as pollen, propolis, royal jelly, brood and venom but they have not been economically exploited.

Currently, Kileo owns 20 acres of land in Tanga with a total of 70 modern beehives and 2,700 chickens. At the moment his main focus is to start producing other bee products such as pollen and royal jelly to meet the market gap of such products.

How he started

It was during his days as a university student that a commercial beekeeper who owns Kisaki Farm in Singida announced that he would offer opportunities for students who were willing to work with him in transforming beekeeping from subsistence to commercial.

“Since I already had a beekeeping background, I found the going easy. I started to develop interest in beekeeping and slowly losing interest in poultry farming,” he explains.

He said although he was still raising chickens, it is not something that he liked due to high costs associated with the exercise. “In bees there are no diseases and they do not need food or vaccinations.” he said.

He said after exhibiting his performance, the management decided to employ him. From the earnings of his employment, he bought about 70 modern beehives which he temporarily set up at Kisaki Farm while planning to relocate to his farm in Tanga.

While at Kisaki, he learned many things, especially producing other byproducts such as pollen and royal jelly which, he said, were in high demand locally and internationally. He said one kilogram of pollen fetches between Sh250,000 and Sh300,000 after value addition through grading and packing in countries like Turkey.

Production/Benefits

Last year, through 70 beehives he harvested 2,100 kilograms of honey as one modern beehive produces 30 kilograms per year while the traditional ones produce less. He sold in Kenya and in the domestic market.

He said beekeeping was simple because even its management does not require much tussle and operating capital. Farmers do not need vast areas.

The modern beehive can last up to 20 years without changing and you continue to harvest honey three times in a year. “The honey market is so big we haven’t even been able to effectively utilize the domestic one. The demand is very high. It is important to ensure the product meets the requirements,” he explained.

Farmers, he said, can continue producing honey and other products at the same time. This is contrary to poultry keeping which requires you to be there all the time.

Mr Kileo currently employs eight youth at his Tanga farm. He also teaches over 300 out growers on how to shift from subsistence to commercial beekeeping.

“I teach them about good beekeeping and how to invest in modern hives that produce large amounts of honey as well as quality honey that is accepted in markets. My dream is to see this sector contribute greatly to the economy and change people’s lives,” he said.

Currently, he also produces candles from beeswax. He sells them to various hotels, restaurants and individuals.

In the coming year, he said, his focus will be on production of royal jelly and pollen.