European Network for Rural Development

Developing a small beekeeping farm in Hungary

EAFRD-funded projects

HUNGARY

Farm's performance, restructuring & modernisation

Location
Fülöpjakab

Programming period
2014 – 2020

Priority
P2 – Competitiveness

Measure
M06 – Farm and Business development

Funding (EUR)
RDP support 15 000

Project duration
2018 – 2021

Project promoter
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Website
n/a

Modernisation and development of a small beekeeping farm in order to increase its profitability and its resilience to weather-associated risks.

Summary

The aim of the project was to develop and modernise a beekeeping farm as well as to increase the size of the hive in order to provide the beneficiary's family with an adequate and secure income. In this framework, the project support helped to develop a hive system suitable for the separation of different types of honey and new bee numbers were added to the existing families. In addition, a variety of beekeeping tools were purchased and a storage space was created to store these devices and the honey properly.

Results

The 38 original families increased to 63, which will be further increased to 80 over the year.

35 of the old hives were changed and new colonies set up.

An oxalic acid sublimatior was acquired to disinfect the bees in a environmentally-friendly way that is better than the drugs that were previously used.

Calculations show that the honey production and the expected income will be doubled.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ For any type of rural development project, it is important to anticipate a long decision-making process that makes planning much more difficult.
- ❑ The beneficiary emphasises that it is important to support beekeeping farms and encourage honey production, given that it is a very risky profession and that bees play an essential and irreplaceable role in agriculture.

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Context

Róbert Bene is a farmer who lives with his wife and three children in the village of Fülöpjakab in Bács-Kiskun County, South of Hungary. He has been running a small farm for more than 10 years. Initially, he produced fruits and vegetables, including melons, which required bees for pollination, leading to his interest in apiculture. Based on his own experience and those of more experienced colleagues, he developed his beekeeping activities step by step each year.

Today, he has stopped growing fruit and vegetables and focuses solely on beekeeping. But along with most agricultural activities, beekeeping is highly affected by weather conditions that cannot be prevented nor defended against. Bee populations can shrink or plant damage occurs results in a low production of honey. Recently, heavy rainfall and a storm caused great damage to acacia flowers, so that year the acacia honey production was only enough to supply his own family. These are high income loss risks that can only be reduced by upscaling production – which means a minimum 80 bee families.

Mr Bene used to produce around 800-1 000 kg of honey each year consisting of four varieties: colza, acacia, mixed flowers and sunflowers. The honey is sold at the end of the season in barrels. Before the sale the wholesale buyer takes samples from the honey, analyses them and makes a lump sum offer based on the results of the samples and the actual market price. If the farmer considers this offer too low, he or she may wish to wait until some upward movement of the market price occurs.

At the project planning phase Mr Bene's buyer said that he would purchase the higher yearly honey production, which assured Mr Bene that he wouldn't encounter any sales or market difficulties for his products in the future. The project would simply allow him to ensure his family's livelihood. According to his calculations, the existing 40 bee families needed to be increased to at least 80 families in order to maintain an economically viable production even in the face any kind of weather difficulties.

Objectives

The main objectives of the projects were to:

- Develop beekeeping activity;
- Ensure the farm's market position; and
- Boost the profitability of the farm.

Activities

The farmer and his wife were considering for years whether to further develop their small farm business, but they did not have enough capital. When a call for proposal was launched in 2016 for the "Development of Small Farms" this presented the opportunity they had been waiting for. The decision to apply was quickly made because the call frame seemed appropriate for their plans. The advantage of the tender structure is that, since it specifically supports small businesses, a relatively simple accounting system could be set up, which is very similar to the young farmers' start-up support. The existing economic size of the farm could be calculated as the own funds of the applicant, and by subsidising it, the obligation is that by the end of the period of maintenance obligation, (i.e. up to 2021) the farm size must reach €6 000 SPV (Standard Production Value).

After submitting the application and correcting it as required, the farm received the decision to support their project plan in February 2018. The size of the project is relatively small, as they requested a total of €15 000, which, if appropriately used, will allow the farm to be increased to the desired size. As a first step in May 2018, the farmer bought new bee families. In June 2018, the storage facility for honey and equipment was established, and the purchase and reconstruction of the new hives were completed for the bee families. A longer term plan is to further develop the farm by purchasing a refrigerator and continuously increasing the number of bee families while buying the necessary hives for them.

The beneficiary used the RDP support for a range of activities including the modernisation of his tools and the purchase new ones and the establishment of a hive system suitable for separating different types of honey. He also obtained a oxalic acid sublimator and thus introduced a new, environmentally-friendly acaricide method; acquired feeding bottles for bees that can be mounted on the side of the hives so that the bees can be feed with sugar syrup without disassembling the hive; constructed a 3x5 m storage space for the honey and tools (previously everything was stored in an empty family property nearby the farm); and increased the size of the bee stock (from 40 families to 80), and as a result the amount of honey production, thus reducing the weather risk.

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Main Results

The 38 original families have so far been increased to 63, and will further increase to 80 over the year.

35 old hives were changed and new colonies set up.

By acquiring the oxalic acid sublimatior, it is possible to replace the use of drugs with an environmentally-friendly method of disinfecting the bees. This method lead to the farm becoming organic, but not before the maintenance obligation expires in 2021.

There is no data on this year's revenue since the beneficiary sells all the produced honey together at the end of the season, but thanks to the long-time relationship with their wholesale buyer, sales are guaranteed, and calculations show that the honey production and the expected income will be doubled.

Key lessons

For any type of rural development project, it is important to recognise that a long decision-making process is expected, which makes planning much more difficult. With the current and long-term developments, the beneficiary plans to set up a well-functioning farm that will ensure his family's livelihood. In Mr Bene’s opinion, it is important to support beekeeping farms and encourage honey production, given that it is a very risky profession that plays an essential and irreplaceable role in agriculture.

Additional sources of information

n/a

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