



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

NEWS RELEASE

www.fao.org

The value of bees is more than just a sweet thing

22 May, Bridgetown, Barbados - The mere sight of bees sends us scampering in fear of being stung, however we savor their honey to sweeten our food, desserts, pastries and teas, especially a hot lemon tea when nursing a common cold. In Barbados alone, the demand for honey is estimated at 350,000 pounds on an annual basis. But bees are more than just producers of honey, a food rich in high-carbohydrate loaded with minerals and vitamins, they are critical to the pollination of many of our favorite fruits and vegetables and without them our biodiversity is at risk.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations states that more than 75% of the world's food crops depend, to some extent, on pollination. Pollinators, like bees, butterflies, birds, moths and beetles help plants to reproduce. Fruits and vegetables are actually plant babies which comes from a plant that has been pollinated.

The new world as we know it today continues to be pummelled by the COVID-19 pandemic and that along with the harsh effects of climate change and natural disasters in the Caribbean places the agricultural sector in the region under extreme pressure. As a result, we are at a critical juncture where all efforts must be made to ensure that we protect bees and other pollinators or face a drastic reduction in food supply and increase in hunger, a grim picture we must avoid at all costs.

The importance of bees is evidenced by the approximate 90.5 million beehives in the world an increase up from about 80 million beehives in 2010. While beekeeping tends to be perceived as a hobby, it can contribute to income generation and increase the livelihood of beekeepers, especially those whose income was impacted by COVID-19.

It is against this background that the United Nations recently designated 20 May as World Bee Day in effort to raise awareness of the importance of pollinators, the threats they face and their contribution to sustainable development goals.

Renata Clarke, Sub-regional Coordinator at FAO stated, “FAO recognizes and underscores the importance of bees and provides technical assistance to countries on issues ranging from queen breeding to artificial insemination to sustainable solutions for honey production and export marketing”.

She recommended that where possible farmers should avoid using pesticides, fungicides or herbicides on farms and gardens as they kill beehives, but suggested diversifying crops as a means to attract bees and other pollinators.

Meanwhile, Pattie Bedford, Technical Consultant for Antimicrobial Resistance at FAO stated, “The extensive ashfall from the recent eruption of the La Soufrière in St. Vincent and the Grenadines covered leaves and trees so there were no immediate food sources available for bees. It was suggested that bees be fed a sugar solution and the Barbados Apiculture Association generously donated 21 bags of sugar each weighing 25 kg and 50 gallons of sugar solution”. It is estimated that 350 hives were safely moved into the green zone.

It is commonly known that bees, the hardest working creatures on the planet, have benefited people, plants and the environment for decades. By carrying pollen from one flower to another, bees and other pollinators enable not only the production of an abundance of fruits, nuts and seeds, but also more variety and better quality, contributing to food security and nutrition. Simply put, our food supply and the quality of food we eat depends on the pollination of bees and we cannot afford to risk a decrease in food supply as many countries continue to face alarming rates of hunger and malnutrition.

For more information, Contact:-

Marquita Sugrim

FAO National Communications Consultant

FAO Subregional Office for the Caribbean

E-mail: marquitajuanne.sugrim@fao.org

+ 1 246 426 7110