



“Busy” uses his beekeeping business to benefit the community in Dominica

November 17, 2021 - Bridgetown, Barbados - Agnan “Busy” St. Louis starts his mornings before sunrise. With a fresh cup of coffee sweetened with honey from his bee farm, he sits on his patio at 5:30 am to gather his thoughts and say his daily prayers. No day can start without this routine.



Busy, as he prefers to be called, got his nickname, not from his association with bees oddly enough, but from primary school, where he reminded his teacher of a lively character in a storybook. Regardless, it is a fitting nickname for this active beekeeper. But before Busy heads down to his bee farm in the quiet village of Colihaut in Dominica, the construction worker turned beekeeper admits that he now loves what he does.

However, life was not always sweet for Busy. He grew up without a father figure and his mother worked doubly hard to ensure that he along with his three brothers and one sister had a comfortable life. “Those were tough days. But thankfully they are behind me, and I’m just pushing forward.”

Busy attended FAO’s course on the practical aspects of beekeeping and later joined the FAO-supported Beekeeping Cooperative. This training helped to make his farm

more efficient and increase production. His first experience with bees was as a young 14-year-old boy still in school. He recalls watching bees fly around wild vines and trees collecting nectar and was amazed by it. It was this sight that sparked his interest in honey making, but of out necessity he pursued a career in construction. After some bad experiences, he decided to quit and take a leap of faith to pursue beekeeping full-time. Receiving his first training from a beekeeper in a nearby village, Busy started to carve out and grow his own business that he runs together with his wife, his nephew and son.

In 2013, Busy found out about FAO's beekeeping course through one of his friends and decided to register to gain deeper knowledge and take his business to the next level. FAO's three-week course armed him with critical information on the practical aspects of beekeeping, including building beehive boxes and mounting frames. He also joined the Beekeeping Cooperative in 2019, which FAO supports through training on improving production and harvesting and processing honey. "That training was invaluable. I learnt so much and am grateful to FAO."

With a strong determination, passion and "know-how", Busy worked diligently in every aspect of the beekeeping trade, including planting trees and even encouraging his neighbors to grow vegetation so the bees could pollinate and collect nectar.

In 2017, Hurricane Maria devastated Dominica and destroyed all of Busy's beehives with its menacing category 5 wind-speeds. However, Busy did not let these circumstances set him back and has since rebuilt everything that was destroyed by the hurricane. Within 12 years, Busy's hard work has paid off. He now has hives located in 13 different areas of Dominica, totaling 275 hives with about 50 000 bees in each hive. His many customers include the lion's share, 99 percent, of local pharmacies.

"Most of my honey and by-products, like beeswax, bee pollen and propolis, are consumed locally. In fact, in 2020 the demand was so high that I was under some pressure in terms of supply."

It is important for Busy to give back to his community. He is always eager and willing to share his knowledge and experiences with others, offering up his bee farm as a space to teach others about best practices in honey production. As the major player in the market, Busy is conscious of his responsibility to give back to the community

which supported his growth and business. Through a partnership with the Ministry of Gender Affairs, he provides free bottles of honey every year as part of gift baskets presented by the government to centenarians.

Busy also offers up his bee farm to FAO and community groups to demonstrate best practices and train others interested in honey production. He is always willing and eager to share his knowledge and experiences with others. But even the busiest of persons deserves a break. So, on Sundays you can find Busy at home unwinding and relaxing with a day full of sports matches on the television.

When asked about his biggest regret in life, he pauses and reflects. "I wish my Mum was still alive to see the success of my business. I wanted to make her proud and for her to know that I'm doing well, and life is sweet."

For more information:

Marquita Sugrim

FAO National Communications Consultant

E-mail: marquitajuanne.sugrim@fao.org

Tel: 1-246-426-7110