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Original Article

The Inspiring Journey of Ramesh Thapa: A Success Story in Apiculture from Dhading, Nepal

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In the scenic hills of Dhading, a district nestled between the Kathmandu Valley and the mountainous regions of Nepal, Ramesh Thapa's story stands as a shining example of perseverance, innovation and resilience. Like many other rural farmers in Nepal, Ramesh came from humble beginnings, relying on subsistence farming to support his family. The challenges of small-scale farming, however, were immense. Poor infrastructure, unpredictable weather and traditional agricultural practices left little room for growth or prosperity.

Ramesh, a farmer with just under a hectare of land, had been growing maize, rice and vegetables for years but his earnings were meager. With climate change leading to erratic rainfall and frequent droughts, it was increasingly difficult to make a stable income. But Ramesh's story is not just about struggle; it's about how he transformed his life and livelihood through apiculture beekeeping despite these challenges.

Early Struggles and the Decision to Start Apiculture: In 2017, Ramesh was grappling with a harsh reality. The traditional farming methods that he and his family had relied upon for generations were no longer enough to sustain them. Each year, his harvest yields were declining and the costs of inputs such as seeds, fertilizers and labor were rising. His village in Dhading district, though rich in natural beauty, lacked basic infrastructure like irrigation systems and the steep terrain made large-scale farming difficult.

At this point, Ramesh realized that continuing on the same path would not lead to a sustainable future. He began exploring alternative agricultural practices that could be integrated into his small plot of land and existing lifestyle. It was during one of his visits to the local market that Ramesh stumbled upon the idea of beekeeping. He met a fellow farmer who had been producing honey for a few years and shared stories of how apiculture had become a growing industry in Nepal. The demand for organic honey was increasing not only in local markets but also for export to urban centers like Kathmandu and beyond.

Intrigued by the possibilities, Ramesh attended a workshop on apiculture organized by the District Agricultural Office. There, he learned about the benefits of beekeeping. Beekeeping could be done on a small plot of land and it required minimal investment compared to large-scale farming and could provide a year-round source of income. Moreover, bees were excellent pollinators which could improve his crop yields. The more Ramesh learned the more convinced he became that this was the opportunity he had been searching for.

Initial Hurdles: Lack of Capital and Knowledge: While the idea of apiculture excited Ramesh, the path to becoming a successful beekeeper was far from easy. The first major hurdle was capital. With most of his savings tied up in traditional farming he did not have enough funds to invest in the equipment needed for beekeeping, such as bee boxes (hives), protective clothing and tools for honey extraction.

To overcome this, Ramesh approached a local cooperative and secured a small loan of NPR 50,000. Although it was not a large sum but it was enough to purchase five bee hives, some basic tools and protective gear. He knew that this investment carried risk especially since he had never managed bees before but he was determined to make it work.

The second challenge was gaining knowledge and experience in beekeeping. While he had attended the workshop there was still a significant learning curve. Ramesh spent hours reading books on apiculture and seeking advice from experienced beekeepers in neighboring villages. He learned about the life cycle of bees, the different types of honey-producing species and how to maintain healthy hives. One of the most valuable lessons he learned early on was the importance of keeping the bees healthy and free from disease which could wipe out an entire colony.

Ramesh's first year in beekeeping was marked by trial and error. A few of his hives failed and he lost some bees due to poor hive management and lack of knowledge about seasonal patterns. But Ramesh did not give up. Every mistake became a lesson that pushed him to improve his techniques. He focused on learning how to manage the hives better, how to provide proper care to the colonies during the winter and how to prevent common problems like Varroa mites, a parasitic mite that can decimate bee populations.

A Turning Point: First Honey Harvest: After a challenging first year, Ramesh's dedication began to pay off. In 2018, his colonies had survived the winter and the bees were actively foraging in the surrounding wildflower-rich hills of Dhading. By mid-year, Ramesh was able to harvest his first batch of honey. The yield though modest, was around 80 kilograms of honey.

This was a turning point for Ramesh. He was able to sell his honey in local markets and to nearby towns. He quickly gained a reputation for producing high-quality, organic honey which was free from chemicals and artificial additives. Encouraged by the positive response, Ramesh decided to reinvest the profits from his first honey harvest into expanding his beekeeping operation. With his earnings, he purchased 10 more hives and began managing a total of 15 bee colonies.

As his knowledge and experience in apiculture grew, so did his confidence. He began to diversify his product offerings, producing not only honey but also beeswax and royal jelly, which could be sold to cosmetic companies and health food markets. This diversification helped stabilize his income, ensuring that he wasn't entirely dependent on honey production alone.



Challenges Along the Way: Despite his growing success, Ramesh still faced many challenges. Beekeeping is highly dependent on the environment and adverse weather conditions can severely impact honey production. In 2020, heavy monsoon rains washed away many of the wildflowers in the area, which significantly reduced the nectar available for the bees. That year, Ramesh's honey production dropped by nearly 30%. However, he had learned from previous setbacks and was better prepared. He had established a relationship with other beekeepers in the region which allowed him to buy and trade bees during difficult seasons.

Another challenge was the ongoing threat of diseases like American Foulbrood and pests like the Varroa mite and ants. Ramesh invested in learning how to use organic methods to manage these threats such as using essential oils and regular hive inspections to keep his colonies healthy.

Scaling Up: From a Farmer to an Entrepreneur: By 2021, Ramesh's beekeeping operation had expanded to over 50 hives and his honey production had reached more than 400 kilograms annually. He earned a steady income of around NPR 500,000 each year that was far more than he had ever made through traditional farming. This financial stability allowed him to send his children to better schools and improve his family's living conditions.

More importantly, Ramesh's success didn't just benefit his family; it had a ripple effect on his community as well. He began to train other farmers in Dhading on apiculture, sharing his knowledge and encouraging them to take up beekeeping as a way to supplement their income. His farm became a small center for learning where aspiring beekeepers could visit and see firsthand how apiculture could be a viable business even on small plots of land.

Ramesh also joined a cooperative of beekeepers in the district where they worked together to market their honey under a single brand. This cooperative allowed them to access larger markets, including Kathmandu, and even explore export opportunities.

Looking Ahead: The Future of Apiculture in Dhading: Today, Ramesh Thapa is a respected figure in his community and a role model for many young farmers. His journey from a struggling subsistence farmer to a successful apiculturist is a testament to the potential of innovation and hard work in transforming rural livelihoods.

Looking to the future, Ramesh plans to continue expanding his beekeeping operation. He is working on developing partnerships with organic food companies and is exploring ways to export honey internationally. He also envisions turning his farm into a formal training center for apiculture where

he can teach not only the technical aspects of beekeeping but also the business skills necessary to succeed.

In the end, Ramesh Thapa's story is more than just a success in apiculture. It is a story of resilience, adaptability and the power of knowledge. In the face of adversity, Ramesh found a way to create a sustainable livelihood for his family, improve his community and promote environmentally friendly agricultural practices. His journey serves as an inspiration to many others in Nepal and beyond, showing that with determination and the right opportunity, even the smallest farmer can achieve greatness.