

**6th Caribbean Beekeeping Congress in Grenada\*\*May 23-27, 2011**



# Antigua & Barbuda Beekeepers Cooperative Society

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First of all let me say thanks for allowing me to attend the 6<sup>th</sup> Regional Beekeeping here in Grenada, beekeepers organization and sponsors alike. It's always a joy and honor to be in your company. Let me take this time to also say thank you to the Association of Caribbean Beekeepers Organization (ACBO) and the Center for the Development of Enterprise (CDE), for offering me the opportunity to be here. In all my 8 years, as the only Apicultural Bee Officer in the Ministry of Agriculture, I had to make many sacrifices to attend previous congresses so let me again say a heart full thank you to the CDE and ACBO.

At the last congress in Trinidad, it was reported that we had the mites and we had lost 80-85% of our hives on the island both feral and managed. Honey and crop productions were down and beekeepers have lost most of their investments and income. Where we were once the envy of Caribbean beekeeping we find ourselves now sinking in the same boat in the same ocean.

Allow me to go back to Jamaica because, what we do we try to take away something from every congress, to make beekeeping on our island a bit better.

After Nevis, what we did was we focused on increasing production and, we achieved that in a big was. After Jamaica, our emphasis was on public awareness

and having emergency services, having the ability to deal with bees' situation and, we also started a project for the prevention of Africanized bees. We worked with GARD Center (Gliberts Agricultural and Rural Development Center) a local NGO on the island. Then we hosted a workshop at which Mr. Mohamed Hallim- Apiculture of Trinidad was our guest speaker. We started a project to set swarm traps around the ports on the island and have them monitored mainly to trap Africanized Bees plus other pests and diseases at least once monthly. It was out of this we discovered the mites checking one of these swarm traps; this was in February of 2005.

We called in a FAVACA hive inspector and we were certified of having the Varroa Mite. At that time, we called a meeting with all the direct stakeholders including: Minister of Agriculture, Director of Agriculture, Senior Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture Extension Division, Chief Chemist, Plant Inspector Officer, and Agriculture Farmers and members of the association.

We reported our findings and recommendations made to us by the certified inspector, and also informed those present at the meeting of the implications this would have on agriculture and by extension the economy. We also made a request to have more vigilant surveillance made and regular inspection done on

both feral and managed colonies on the island. The Ministry Trade Extension Officer then informed me that I could not have the use of transportation.

I also requested to make some trips to Barbuda our sister island to do some inspections and try to keep the island mite free for as long as possible so, we wanted to extend our swarm trapping project onto Barbuda. I was then informed by the same senior minister that I was not going to be allowed to visit Barbuda to do inspections. Instead, an Agriculture Field Officer with very little experience in beekeeping was chosen to do so and the project collapsed. I was forced to resign from my position because, I thought at that time my position was undermined and I found myself in a dead end job going nowhere collecting a salary for doing nothing.

The positive thing that came out from all of this is that the most serious beekeepers on the island did not give up and we knitted ourselves together closely, helping each other in every way we could.

A lot of people thought we were crazy both locally and regionally to carry out the recommendations made by the inspector for not going the chemical route. We thought we were going to lose all of our colonies. We stuck to our guns and we decided we were not going to go the route. Now, I am very happy to report what

seemed like six short years despite of all the frustration and loss of revenue by beekeepers; we are now experiencing our best year or year and a half in terms of the numbers of colonies on the island, both feral and managed and honey and crop production.

We are not out of the woods as yet by any stretched of the imagination. We have a far way to go but, we are making small steps in the right direction. We still have lots of work to do. We still have the mites though it's not in a large infestation and we are still without a field officer from 2006 up to today.

Our association is struggling to keep our membership growing because, of all the loss of revenue, frustration of not being helped, but we are not giving up the fight.

In 2008, we wrote a project proposal and got funding from GEF (Global Environment Facility) based in Barbados. It was a 3 part project: Aim at increasing membership, replanting most of the bee friendly trees that had been destroyed over the past years through natural disasters and quote unquote development. And finally, to repopulate our island with surviving stock of bees after the devastation caused by the mite.

To date we have had three introductory training courses facilitated by myself, Mr. Langlais (the President) and Mr. Jarvis who some of us are familiar with. He had made reservation to be here but had to cancel at the last minute because of some small family issues. He sends his blessings to the Congress. Dr. Anthony Richards also asked me to say hi to the congress especially Solomon and Ms Nicola Bradbear. We have planted just over a hundred trees so far and distributed another two hundred plus. This is out of the projective five thousand trees, but there still a lot of work to do in this area. We also held a queen rearing course and Mr. Hugh Smith of Jamaica was our regional consultant and, he was very impressed with the level of knowledge and expertise on the subject in Antigua. We also made a trip to Barbuda where we did some inspections and made a few recommendations.

We have had several meeting with the Minister, Permanent Secretary and Senior Officer in the Ministry of Agriculture trying to get them on board in the fight to keep our industry alive. We have even offered voluntary training to whoever is selected to work with beekeepers. The process is slow but in recent meetings we have sensed that we are finally getting somewhere.

From where we were in 2005 to now, the future may not seem all that bright but at least it's very encouraging and there's a renewed interest in beekeeping recently. Equipments have been going rapidly and young beekeepers have been popping up all over the place.

I want to say, finally to all the participants, have a successful and progressive 2011 congress. I thank you!