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Sweet as honey

"Bees are our only source of income, and it is a wealth for us."

Appa Shah Gul; Saqab village, Ghorband valley, Parwan.

Since being introduced into our programme in 1992, bee-keeping has proved to be a very successful initiative for Afghanaid. At the outset 50 colonies of bees were purchased in Pakistan and transported to Badakhshan in the far north-east of Afghanistan in 1992 and 1993. The areas most suited to bee-keeping are those at lower altitudes, such as Jurm District. Initially 30 hives were distributed to 10 families in five villages in this area. This has now increased to 30 families owning 168 hives in nine villages, with no further input from Afghanaid except training. Each of the hives in Jurm now produces an average of 19.3 kg of honey and bee-keeping is recognised as a local industry. Traders visit regularly, carrying Jurm honey to other parts of Afghanistan.

Everyone who receives bee hives from Afghanaid is given training and regular support from extension workers. They also agree to return one hive to Afghanaid for each one given in the next year. In this

way we are able to extend the programme to other villages.

Apiculture has proved to be very popular among Afghanaid's beneficiary communities, with the hives bringing tangible improvements to their livelihoods. For example, Obaidullah from Hesarak village in Jurm District was given four beehives by Afghanaid. In his second year he produced six more hives, yielding 130 kg of honey, of which he sold 90 kg. When asked how the bees had affected his life he replied: "First of all we use the honey in our family as food. It is also good for our health. With the money I made from selling honey I have been able to buy wheat, rice, ghee, oil and clothes for my family. Without this money it would be very difficult, maybe even impossible for us to make ends meet."

Many people have gone on to produce several new hives over a sustained period of time: Fazil, from Baharak (a town of about 800 families) in Badakhshan was given three hives in 1994. By the end of 1997 he had increased the number to 40. He explained: "I am 18 years old and I am one of a family of 10. My brother and I look after the hives together. We can sell the honey and surplus hives locally which means that our family now has a much higher income. Each kilogram of honey sells for 250,000 Afghanis (about £2.40) in

the bazaar and we get about 20-30 kgs of honey from each hive. Next year I plan to set up my own business with a shop in the bazaar and by getting more hives we will be able to sell honey in other provinces too because it is very popular."

Recipients of bee hives have also found that they can make the difference when it comes to surviving unexpected hardships. For example, when Afghanaid's Information Officer, Esmatullah Shahpoor, visited the earthquake affected region of Shahr-i-Buzurg last July, he spoke to Nasir in Baghik Village. Nasir was given three beehives by Afghanaid in 1997, and had increased the number to five when he met Shahpoor. He was expecting to produce two more hives later in the year. Last year Nasir kept all of his honey for his family, but this year he was planning to sell half of it. "This will be the first time that somebody has sold honey in Shahr-i-Buzurg. The beehives will play an important role in my future economy. When I have honey I don't need to buy sugar. Instead of selling my animals and timbers, I can sell the honey and beehives to provide for my family. In the recent earthquake my house was partly destroyed. When I sell my honey it will enable me to feed my family this winter and help me to rebuild my house."

These are just some of the many success



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stories which Afghanaid apiculturists see every year and beekeeping is now an integral part of our programme. In Baharak district, for example, there are now over 1,000 bee hives and the town has become home to Afghanaid's "mother" stock, used to supply bees to families in other areas of Badakhshan.