

# PROMOTION OF THE ORGANIC HONEY VALUE CHAIN: THE ORGANIC BEEKEEPERS NETWORK OF THE BALA'AN K'AAX PROTECTED AREA, MÉXICO

TL3 MX

## » Context and challenges

The Bala'an K'aax Flora and Fauna Protection Area (BKFFPA), managed by the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP), is located in the municipality of José María Morelos, Quintana Roo, Mexico. It has 37 neighboring ejidos where beekeeping is one of the most important economic activities of the local population, not only for income generation, but also for its benefits in agricultural production, biodiversity protection and ecosystem services, if carried out in a sustainable manner. An opportunity was identified to promote practices that ensure the safety and quality of honey, the health of hives, as well as the organizational model for the fair marketing of apiculture. Considering the potential for economic development derived from beekeeping in the

region, its link with the conservation of natural spaces, in accordance with the Bala'an K'aax Strategic Plan, and promoted by the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Selva Maya Project, in 2015 the BKFFPA management proposed the creation of a Network of Organic Honey Producers as a sustainable business strategy. In conjunction with the Project, the objective was to promote organic honey production with a value chain approach in order to contribute to the fair marketing and equitable distribution of benefits, to increase the income of beekeepers in the region, as well as to protect the biodiversity and ecosystem services surrounding the protected area (PA).

## Beneficiaries

Direct beneficiaries are the 35 beekeepers from the Bala'an K'aax Beekeepers Network who improved their skills in managing production and organizational processes and have sufficient infrastructure to market their products.



## Impacts

- ◆ The Beekeepers Network has appropriated the vision of sustainable management and is today a reference in the region for the promotion of organic honey production techniques.
- ◆ They have developed skills and capacities for teaching pest control, feeding, hive sharing and harvesting techniques.
- ◆ The members of the Network practice sustainable beekeeping that promotes equitable and fair sharing of benefits, reduces damage to biodiversity and ecosystem services, and aims to conserve the protected area.
- ◆ The Network is a strengthened organization with defined tasks, which allows the members to ensure the continuity of activities necessary in organic production.
- ◆ The Network has a corporate identity which improved the presence in the packaged honey market and generates resources for the distribution and sale of the product in formal markets at regional, national and international levels.



## Capacity development for the organization and production of organic honey

Exchanges of experiences at local and regional level, training in good practices and assistance visits in apiaries have been fundamental in raising awareness, acquiring knowledge and building trust among producers. Today they are a model of self-management of basic operations such as wax stamping and internal control.

**Enabling factors:** The knowledge of the producers and their experience in beekeeping has been the starting point for the development of new practices according to organic production criteria. The process was seen as an exchange of knowledge and not as a one-side transfer of information and knowledge from experts to the target group.

## Marketing promotion of bulk and packaged honey

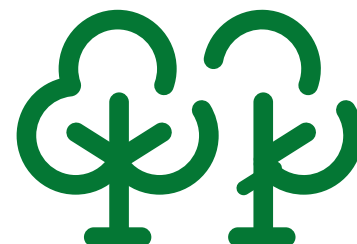
Working for conservation, generates direct benefits and advantages for sustainable economic activities: beekeepers develop their activities in the area of influence of the BKFFPA, enabling the production of quality honey, free of contaminants and with ideal organoleptic qualities (taste and smell), adding value to the final product, which has been the basis for marketing of the product through specialized fairs and points of sale. Additionally, the development of a corporate identity of the Beekeepers Network ensures that packaged honey has a better presence on the market by communicating the values and messages of conservation and sustainable production of the Network thus contributing to the cohesion and identity of the producers.

**Enabling factors:** Organic honey is marketed in large quantities through the EDUCE Cooperative, which operates at a regional level, promotes the production of organic honey, carries out fair trade collection and sells honey to trading partners in Europe. Having partners that connect the value chain with equitable distribution of benefits is key.

## Internal management of the Beekeepers Network and infrastructure

The definition of the Beekeepers Network's tasks and the appropriate assignment of responsibilities and roles of each member of the organization, has been a key to ensure operational sustainability. Likewise, maintaining a co-investment in kind and money from part of the Network, as well as support from BKFFPA-CONANP, has been fundamental to develop production processes, such as collection and stamping, without relying on external parties, and ensuring the fulfillment of the criteria of organic production.

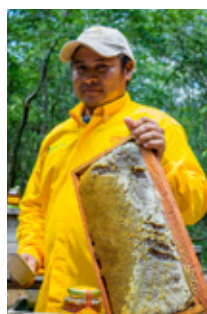
**Enabling factors:** The simultaneous participation of the beekeepers in the protected area's community brigades for the monitoring and control of the PA, has contributed to promoting coordination and communication between them and the recognition of the importance of the area for beekeeping.



The success of the strategy derives from the fact that most members were already experienced beekeepers with common activities and interests, including community-based surveillance and monitoring for the protected area (1). This promotes an integrated and organized Network that, together with the BKFFPA Directorate, designs and implements integral and effective planning for the conservation and use of natural resources and ecosystem services (2). This results in benefits such as commercialization of packaged honey in specialized markets (3), sensitization from a peer perspective, and avoidance of the development of inadequate agricultural practices.

## » Story

For many people in the region, honey production is a source of income. In addition to carrying out this economic activity, the members of the Beekeepers Network also carry out forest protection efforts, they have established a voluntary monitoring and surveillance team to support the work of CONANP. In this sense, **Luis Ariel Ongay Carrillo** emphasizes that "what we do is a job [beekeeping] that does not damage the forest, we are a committed



community and do not want to destroy the forest that we have in our ejido, because from there comes the flower that gives us honey". The work of the community brigade plays a crucial role in the protection of the Selva Maya, they carry out patrolling and monitoring through camera traps, to know and protect the biodiversity of the area. In this context, **Ricardo Tun González** concludes that "the area has something valuable that we must continue to conserve."

