



*Staff at work at the Hagana plant that is processing raw honey into refined products that meet international market standards.
Photo Credit: Panagri Media Reporter*

South Sudan honey processor sweetens the deal for beekeepers

By Panagri Media Correspondent

TUCKED away in the outskirts of South Sudan's capital Juba in Jebel, the machine at a small processing plant spins on, turning raw honey into a refined product that meets the quality standards on the international market.

Emmanuel Zamoi is one of the beekeepers who have found the processing plant operated by Hagana Agro-processing Co. Ltd useful in boosting their income.

"Getting the market for honey was a big problem for us since there were no buyers," the 46-year-old said on the phone from his home in Western Equatoria's County of Maridi.

Zamoi owns an apiary with about 100 beehives.

"I did not know I would sell my honey with all the combs for about 500 South Sudanese pounds (SSP). But now we are sure of a ready market, and prices are stable at around 800 SSP," he said.

Honey is a natural alternative to refined sugar and an immune booster and builder.

South Sudan's potential in production and export of honey could rival Africa's biggest producer, neighbouring Ethiopia.

Matata Safi, the chief executive of Hagana Agro-processing, said South Sudan has a conducive environment for honey production owing to its vast forest reserves, swamps and savanna which provide a home for bees to thrive and make honey.

Areas suitable for honey production include the Bahr el Ghazal, Lakes, Western Equatoria, Eastern Equatoria, Upper Nile and Unity states.

But the traditional methods of beekeeping employed and massive displacement of communities due to insecurity have left the sector struggling.

Hagana Agro-processing is working with 617 beekeepers, mainly from the Western Equatoria State, to ensure value addition through processing and packaging of honey.

Safid said honey is "becoming a key commodity in the world market as people move away from refined sugar".

The plan, according to Safi, is to ensure honey from South Sudan fetches much more for its farmers. "If you can do value addition, you will be able to get more money," he said.

Six years of conflict in South Sudan left 400,000 people dead, displaced four million others and slashed the production of crude oil, the country's main revenue source and led to an economic crisis.

Agriculture bore the heaviest brunt as communities traded their farmlands and production for security in internally displaced people's camps or as refugees across the border.

Relative peace that followed the implementation of a 2018 peace agreement has opened doors for communities to rebuild their livelihoods, including resuming farming.

However, faced with floods, the Covid-19 effects and global commodity crises, the country is still struggling with food security. The United Nations and partners project 7.74 million people in South Sudan are currently food insecure.

Several enterprises are investing in agro-processing to increase food production, get better prices in the market and reduce post-harvest losses.

Companies are venturing in production of soft drinks from fruits, beer from sorghum and cooking oil from simsim and groundnuts among others.

Export breakthrough

Despite starting operations only five years ago, the products of

“We are not only producing honey to be consumed locally. For you to have your honey placed in a store in Japan or in any international market you have to meet standards and for you to meet standards, you



Matata Safi, the Chief Executive Officer of Hagana Agro-processing Co. Ltd in his office. Photo Credit: Panagri Media Reporter

have to meet quality from production up to processing and packaging,” Safi said.

“We are enlightening our farmers to know that honey can be one of the drivers of economic growth in South Sudan.”

With small companies embracing value addition in local production, agriculture products will garner more money in the industry, he said.

“What we need is a holistic environment where all these small companies are doing value addition, creating lots of jobs for our youth and our women and contributing to economic development,” Safi said.

Local consumers are increasingly buying the locally processed honey with shops and supermarkets demanding more of the local product.

“This is because the whole value chain is monitored, our farmers are trained and give us quality honey,” Safi said.

“Today we have become a brand name in South Sudan and if you go to any shop or supermarket, people say ‘this is the quality we know’.”



Hagana products on display ready for sale. Photo Credit: Panagri Media Reporter