



## **Popular Article**

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# **Revolutionizing Beekeeping through Honey-Based Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)**

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The Government of India has increasingly recognized beekeeping as a high-potential agri-allied activity capable of generating sustainable livelihoods, enhancing crop productivity, and strengthening nutritional security. The sector gained renewed momentum with the announcement of Honey-based Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) under the Central Sector Scheme for Formation and Promotion of 10,000 FPOs. As a pioneering step, National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) promoted five Honey FPOs across selected districts in different states, signaling a structured push toward organizing beekeepers into market-oriented collectives.

## **Beekeeping: An Inclusive and Sustainable Livelihood**

Beekeeping in India is largely concentrated in the unorganized sector, particularly among rural and tribal communities. It is estimated that nearly 4 lakh individuals are engaged in apiculture, managing around 34 lakh bee colonies and producing approximately 90–95 thousand tonnes of honey annually. As a non-land-based activity, beekeeping offers significant opportunities for landless farmers, women, and youth. It fits seamlessly within integrated farming systems and provides a reliable source of subsidiary income.

Beyond honey production, beekeeping plays a crucial ecological and economic role. Through cross-pollination, honeybees enhance crop yields by 20–80 percent in many cultivated crops, including mustard, sunflower, oilseeds, pulses, cabbage, cauliflower, and carrots. In addition to honey, beekeeping yields high-value products such as royal jelly, bee pollen, beeswax, propolis, and even bee venom—diversifying income streams for rural households.

## **Institutional Support and Policy Framework**

To provide structured support to the sector, the National Bee Board (NBB) was constituted in 2006 to promote scientific beekeeping, improve crop yields through pollination, and enhance the income of beekeepers. In 2018, a Beekeeping Development Committee chaired by Bibek Debroy was established to recommend strategies for advancing the sector. The committee emphasized institutional strengthening, modernization of infrastructure, quality control, market expansion, and export facilitation. Key recommendations included establishing integrated bee development centers, creating a honey price stabilization fund, promoting value-added bee products, simplifying export procedures, and recognizing honeybees as an agricultural input.

Currently, NBB supports beekeeping initiatives under the National Horticulture Mission (NHM) and the Horticulture Mission for North East and Himalayan States (HMNEH), further integrating apiculture with horticultural development.

## **Honey-Based FPOs: A Structured Approach**

Under the Central Sector Scheme, 100 Honey-based FPOs are proposed to be formed across the country. These FPOs aim to mobilize and capacitate beekeepers, enhance productivity through modern technologies, and facilitate better market access. While the scheme envisions mobilizing 300 beekeepers per block, this target presents practical challenges due to the dispersed nature of beekeeping clusters.

The scheme provides comprehensive support, including infrastructure development, training and exposure visits, value addition, and financial assistance in the form of equity grants, credit guarantees, and management cost support. Custom Hiring Centres may be established to maintain up to 1,000 bee colonies and to develop essential operational infrastructure. Additionally, Honey FPOs are expected to promote youth engagement in breeding centers and carpentry units for bee box manufacturing.

## **Ground-Level Implementation**

In 2020, NAFED facilitated the formation of five Honey FPOs in East Champaran (Bihar), Morena (Madhya Pradesh), Bharatpur (Rajasthan), Mathura (Uttar Pradesh), and the Sunderbans (West Bengal). These FPOs have mobilized unemployed women and tribal communities into organized production units, providing training in improved production practices, business planning, and market linkage development.

FPOs are being linked with exporters and processing industries to ensure improved price realization. Infrastructure support for storage, testing laboratories, and marketing is being strengthened, while financial security is enhanced through credit guarantees. Honey FPOs are

also eligible for support under the Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises Scheme (PM-FME) for upgrading processing and branding facilities.

Parallel efforts by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), particularly through the Honey Mission Action Plan (2018), have further strengthened the ecosystem. KVIC has provided modern bee boxes, technical training through the Central Bee Research and Training Institute, and logistical support for migration of bee colonies. Plans are also underway to establish Integrated Beekeeping Development Centres in every state.

### **Market Dynamics and Value Realization**

Honey production in India is closely linked to crops such as mustard, coriander, acacia, and ajwain. Mustard honey accounts for a major share due to its wide cultivation and affordability, while ajwain honey is considered premium and is widely used in medicinal applications.

Through collective aggregation, branding, packaging, and marketing, Honey FPOs can bridge supply chain gaps and enhance price realization for beekeepers. By negotiating directly with bulk buyers, exporters, and processors, FPOs can reduce intermediary margins and improve returns to primary producers.

### **Toward a “Sweet Revolution”**

The integration of honey-based FPOs under a unified policy framework marks a transformative step toward what may be termed a “Sweet Revolution” in India. By converging multiple schemes under a single umbrella, the Central Sector Scheme ensures coordinated institutional, financial, and technical support to beekeepers.

With collective branding, improved quality standards, export promotion, and value addition, Honey FPOs hold the potential to reposition Indian apiculture as a globally competitive sector. More importantly, they promise to enhance income, employment, and resilience among rural and tribal communities—turning beekeeping into a vibrant pillar of sustainable agricultural development.