

Brief Moment with Honey Apipreneur Jony Girma



Figure 1. Mr. Jony Girma was one of the finalists of the Young Agripreneurs Project of GFAR.

Becoming a honey apipreneur has been Jony Girma's wish since he joined the Honey Processing Company "Beza Mar Agro-Industry" in 2009 as operations manager. He argues that "the honey sector is one of the few sectors in Ethiopia that has a high potential to achieve growth and transformation across all categories of rural households". Jony Girma established his own Agribusiness called 'APIS Agri Business P.L.C.' in March 2014 together with his business partner Dr. Nuru Adgaba (a senior bee researcher). In his answers on AgriProFocus' questions, Jony Girma provides his insights in his success and the challenges that come with becoming a sustainable apipreneur in Ethiopia; contributing to youth employment, rural development and natural forest conservation.

"Rural youth I work with are highly motivated apipreneurs, because many of them are unemployed and landless; luckily, for beekeeping you do not need much land"

Could you briefly explain what made you to establish APIS Agribusiness P.L.C.?

After I finished my Master study in Organic Agriculture, I got the opportunity to obtain a PhD. Although I was tempted to continue my education, I felt the need to contribute to Ethiopia's rural development in a more direct and tangible way. I then decided to apply my theoretical knowledge and practical experience regarding honey production and organic agriculture and start my own organic honey production business. That is when APIS Agribusiness P.L.C. came to life. APIS aims to produce, process and market organic honey, beeswax and other bee products linked with different sector development services. For this purpose, we (me and my business partner Dr. Nuru) obtained 3000 square meter of land in Mojo¹ to build APIS' honey and beeswax processing & technology center. The processing & technology center is under construction and is expected to finish by 2017.

How do you think you can contribute with your Agribusiness to youth employment and rural development?

With the financial support from SNV's ASPIRE project, APIS trained 200 beekeepers for the first time. I then found out that from the 200 trained beekeepers the rural youth were way more motivated and ambitious to be involved in the beekeeping business and adopt new technologies and practices. I think that the reason for this is that most rural youth are landless and looking for other ways to generate income. Since beekeeping does not require much land unlike other agricultural sub-sectors, this sector is a great way for rural youth to stay involved in agriculture.



Figure 2. Rural youth obtained a beekeeping training by APIS.

Based on that experience, I wanted to connect APIS with rural youth. Moreover, working with rural youth creates an opportunity to use simple ICT for productivity improvement and to use the youth as mentors for other beekeepers in the village. I developed a self-help business model for a sustainable organic honey supply chain. With the international award fund I received from the Young Agripreneurs Project (YAP) organized by GFAR and YAPARD, I trained 50 rural

¹ Mojo is located in East-Showa Zone and 80km away from the capital city, Addis Ababa.

unemployed youth to implement the model. This training was held in a learning center I built in the village where these youth are living. After the training, I made a contract agreement with the 50 trained youth for which APIS provides them with a secured and stable income. In return, the trained youth will provide APIS with a sustainable honey supply by taking care of the honey production of 10 beehives per trained youth and overseeing the beekeeping activities of 5 other beekeepers that are not trained by APIS. All of the youth I have a contract with are monitored by APIS' two technical staff that are in the field. They visit a couple of youth per month. In addition to that, APIS is developing an SMS-system to update the youth through mobile phone about the necessary steps to take regarding their beekeeping activities (e.g. seasonal colony management, honey harvesting).

What challenges do you face in your progress to becoming a successful organic honey agribusiness?

The biggest problem I face is the lack of access to get a loan from the bank. Since I do not have a collateral, I cannot get a loan from the bank. This makes it difficult for me to realize the many ideas I have. For example, I would like to produce organically and obtain the certificate for it. However, I do not have enough budget for that yet. Although I am currently looking for support, I would prefer to have access to a loan because I am sure that I will be able to pay it back after my business starts growing.

"I want to be the first in organic honey production in Ethiopia meanwhile contributing to youth employment, rural development and natural forest conservation"

What do you want to have achieved in 5 years from now?

My dream is to be among the first in sustainable organic honey production in Ethiopia. I also want to contribute to rural development by keeping the youth attracted to stay in the country side and be actively involved in agricultural activities. APIS' focus to work with rural youth will therefore not only provide opportunities for them to generate income, but will also indirectly contribute to rural development. Additionally, I am planning to connect my honey business to natural forest conservation by planting 10 trees for each beehive that we have. APIS is about creating quality honey, happy beekeepers and a healthy environment. To achieve this, we have business slogan called 'No Tree, No Bee, No Honey, No Money'.

How can the 'Youth in Agribusiness Community of Practice ' run by AgriProFocus assist you in achieving your goals?

The Youth in Agribusiness Community of Practice is a great way in which APIS can share knowledge, experience and link up with different organizations, agribusinesses and other professionals working to improve (rural) youth employment. Besides, during the last 'Youth in Agribusiness Community of Practice' workshop held in September 2016, I was able to speak to a representative of the Ministry of Youth & Sport. I told this representative how I work with rural youth and the financial challenges I am facing. Since they have dedicated a considerable amount of financial support to improve youth employment, we immediately planned for a follow up meeting.

My advice is to invite more agribusinesses to join this platform (currently I am one of the few). These agribusinesses could share their expertise on the skills needed to be engaged in agribusinesses and, at the same time, we could connect youth to their agribusinesses in different ways.

If you are interested to read more about Jony Girma's beekeeping activities, please find 3 weblinks to his blogs below:

1. Jony Girma (May 3, 2016). *No Tree, No Bee, No Honey, No Money*. The Global Forum on Agricultural Research Website: <https://blog.gfar.net/2016/05/03/no-tree-no-bee-no-honey-no-money/>
2. Jony Girma (August 18, 2016). *Busy as bees moving forward*. The Global Forum on Agricultural Research Website: <https://blog.gfar.net/2016/08/18/busy-as-bees-moving-forward/>
3. Jony Girma (October 21). *Bees and the busy rural youth*. The Global Forum on Agricultural Research Website: <https://blog.gfar.net/2016/10/21/bees-and-the-busy-rural-youth/>

For further information, you can e-mail Mr. Jony Girma directly: apisagribusiness@gmail.com / jgmershesha@gmail.com



Figure 3. Practical training in beehive construction and beeswax extraction at APIS' learning center.