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KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

SUCCESS STORY

Small Loan Rejuvenates Honey Business

A micro-financing program encourages economic development in southern Kyrgyzstan



Jeenmyrza Kunashev from Kyzyl-Kol Village, Aksy Raion shows the honey his new bees produce. Photo: Mercy Corps

USAID and Mercy Corps' microfinance program provides resources for Kyrgyz bee-keepers to upgrade their breeds of bees, increase production.

During Soviet times, Aksy Raion was noted for honey production. Arable land and pastures suitable for livestock are scarce in the raion, and most households were involved in bee-keeping and breeding. Its delicious honey was exported as far as Japan, France and Yugoslavia. Honey production was not only their primary source of income but also a source of local pride. However, following

the collapse of the Soviet Union the consumer associations that had assisted bee-keepers were disbanded. The bee-keepers lost vital support ranging from help repairing their bee hives to training and marketing their honey. One of the most serious consequences was the neglect of maintenance and renewal of bee breeds. This resulted in bees with weakened immunities, lower fertility rates, and decreased production.

When experienced local bee-keeper Jeenmyrza Kunashev from Kyzyl-Kol village, Aksy Raion learned about the USAID and Mercy Corps' Cluster Endowment Fund, he and 20 other farmers applied for the fund's micro-loans to finance the renewal of their bee breeds. With the received money, they purchased 420 packages of the pure-bred Caucasus and Carpathian bees, each worth of about \$30. These breeds are known to be less

susceptible to diseases and hardier under harsh conditions. Introducing the new breeds with the old bees helps regenerate and improve the local gene pool. The participating farmers also completed a USAID-sponsored workshop on bee diseases, forage, pollination, and other topics as well as received a consultation from an American marketing specialist.

The investment proved to be successful. "Most of my bees of the local breeds died last year when the winter was very severe," says Jeenmyrza. "And almost all of the new bees I bought with a USAID-sponsored loan survived." While the old hives produced no honey, the new hives produced up to 25 kilograms each, and Jeenmyrza was able to generate a modest income.

Jeenmyrza also benefited because 15 brood frames were produced by the bees instead of the typical 11-12 frames. "Never in my life have I seen such results," he says. "The new breeds of bees are also much more mobile," says Jeenmyrza, meaning they pollinate orchards and flowers over a greater area which favorably impacts crop productivity and forage supply for livestock.

Now Jeenmyrza and other community members are hoping to start raising their own pure-bred bee queens which will allow production of honey at the quality and volume necessary for export abroad. Perhaps once again, delicious and nutritious Aksy honey will grace the shelves of shops in many other countries.