

HONEY PRODUCTION IN HAITI

by CONRAD BÉRUBÉ

Apiarists of Jacquesyl and Farmer-to-Farmer volunteer Conrad Bérubé with a Kenya top bar hive which they built earlier in the day and into which they have transferred the contents of a fixed-comb hive.



From July 13–30, 2009, I visited the apiaries of beekeepers in the North and South of Haiti to evaluate their hives and make recommendations to improve honey production. Beekeeping is an income-generating activity in Haiti that creates opportunities for Haitians to improve their livelihoods.

The trip was sponsored by Partners of the Americas as part of the *Farmer to Farmer* Program. Founded in 1964, Partners of the Americas links U.S. states with Latin American and Caribbean countries in partnerships that use the energy and skills of citizen volunteers, their institutions and communities to address shared concerns of social, economic and cultural development. Its work covers areas as diverse as emergency preparedness, agriculture, cultural and educational exchange, domestic violence and local government strengthening. Partners is a private, non-profit, non-partisan organization with international offices in Washington, D.C. (for additional information see www.partners.net). The *FtF* Program improves economic opportunities in rural areas of Latin America and the Caribbean by increasing food production and distribution, promot-

ing better farm and marketing operations and conserving natural resources. The program is supported by Congress and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) as part of the United States foreign assistance program. *FtF* brings together agricultural professionals and practitioners from the U.S. and the Caribbean. Volunteers from the U.S. work with farmers and agribusiness owners in Guyana, Haiti, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic to identify local needs and design projects to address them.

Other volunteers in the Haiti *FtF* Apiculture project and similar programs (see Todd Jameson's article in the May 2009 issue of *American Bee Journal*) have noted some progress in the practice of transferring fixed comb hives to moveable frame hives— although improper frame spacing was a common problem in apiaries—in the identification and treatment of hive maladies and indicated that it seemed likely that the incursion of African(ized) Honey Bees (AHB) was taking place in parts of Haiti. *FtF* volunteers have also worked on packaging and labeling issues and in working wax up into various products such as stamped foundation wax, candles and ornaments.



Many box hives into which frames were, or could be, placed have become fixed comb hives because apiarists cannot afford the time or cost of building frames, or because they do not properly use or space the frames they do have.



Many apiarists in Haiti continue to use rustic, fixed-comb hives of either hollowed logs or boxes which severely limit management options and thereby reduce productivity.

While in Haiti I worked closely with Country Coordinator Benito Migny Jasmin, and Field Officer Gerard Michel (Papy) Joseph.

Apiarists in Haiti face three major hurdles: a lack of technical skills, a lack of economic resources and a lack of general infrastructure. All three dynamics can be addressed to some extent by promoting the (Kenya Top Bar) movable comb hive rather than the (Langstroth) movable frame hive. The KTBH is easier to manage both physically (no stacked boxes to remove) and with respect to beekeeping skills (the brood nest is held within a single box and is more readily conceptualized and manipulated). The hive is easy to build from rough-cut lumber with hand tools and is thus cheaper than frame hives which require relatively high quality lumber and, generally, the use of power tools. Harvesting by cutting out combs can be done without the need to haul heavy supers to an extracting room (since most beekeepers do not have access to a vehicle for such a purpose) and, of course, does not require an ex-

tractor or uncapping knives. Honey can be sold in the comb (a proof of authenticity) at a profit since little capital outlay is required rather than requiring transport to distant markets where a greater price might be garnered, but which would require a much greater degree of market preparation, transport costs and marketing savvy. This is still an option to reap greater rewards with honey produced in KTBH's— rather than a necessity, as is true, in order to clear a profit, for the much more capital-intensive frame hive production system.

My trip was relatively short and I was able to make significant contact with only a couple of dozen parties involved in apicultural development in Haiti. I hope that follow-up activities in 2010 will include at least two intensive, five-day short-courses (one in the north and one in the south). It would be very useful to train at least a dozen rural apiarists at each short-course so they could take their learning back to their own communities. Such courses usually involve participants staying in a live-in training center with focus on hands-on training at apiaries established for the purpose.

In 2008 the Haiti *FitF* Apiculture project held the first "Beekeeping Congress" among beekeepers in the North of Haiti assisted by *FitF* Volunteer Don Hopkins. It was well received and the proposed 2010 workshop would involve cooperation between multiple volunteers pooling their resources and expert-

ise and, very likely, sponsorship from parties both within and outside of Haiti. If you or your bee club would be interested in sponsoring a participant at the short-course please contact the author (250 751-3167 or conrad.berube@gov.bc.ca) or Meghan Olivier at Partners of the Americas (202-637-6223 or molivier@partners.net).



James, an apiarist in the town of Jacquesyl in the north west of Haiti, participates in the construction of a Kenya top bar hive.



Educational beekeeping videos shown on a laptop computer became a "mini-cine" as the townspeople in Jacquesyl dubbed it



At the shop of the Apiculture Association of Aquin local carpenters constructed a Kenya top bar hive using hand tools.