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## For this Brazilian Urban Couple Beekeeping Became a Honey of a Business

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Tuesday, 02 December 2008

Our story starts like this: Once upon a time there was a couple, a therapist and a psychologist. They lived in a large city, Rio de Janeiro, in the Brazilian Southeast. They had a son and decided, from then on, to live a different life, better, more healthy and attuned to the ideals of ecology and sustainability.

They packed their bags and, literally, climbed the mountain range, moving to Teresópolis. They sold their apartment in Rio and bought a nice piece of land. The couple became beekeepers, had one more son and now own brand Mel de Teresópolis.

They produce around 6,000 tons of honey a year and now sell to large supermarkets in Brazil, like Pão de Açúcar. This is the story of Adriano Rodrigues de Azevedo and his wife, Lúcia. A case that brings together production and respect for nature.

The couple's change of life took shape in 1999, when they decided to sell their land in Rio de Janeiro and, with the money, to buy a piece of land to live on. They searched and found the ideal place in Teresópolis.

At the time they bought the land, it was not even possible to have a landline telephone at the site. The road there was a mud road. But that was not a problem, it attracted the couple even more. To make their dream of living in the mountain range true, Azevedo and Lúcia had to abandon their jobs and that was when another of their passions was born: beekeeping.

"A fascinating activity," explains Azevedo, who says that bees "are fantastic, as they are the only species that only give to man, without destroying or dirtying anything." Bees are also responsible for pollination, which guarantees the food on our tables.

The beginning, explained Azevedo, was very complicated, and there were just three or four hives. "The first ones were destroyed by ants," he says. Much dedication and learning was necessary to proceed with the activity, which now includes 200 hives spread around the region, in neighboring farms. This, according to Azevedo, is a characteristic of beekeeping: it brings people closer.

"It is not good to have all the hives in the same area, it is necessary to diversify, it works like cattle, which needs a hectare to grow. It is the same with bees, so we end up knocking on the door of our neighbor and asking for a partnership, we take the bees and negotiate part of the produce," he explains.

Beekeeping also contributes for the preservation of the woodlands as, to produce honey and other products, bees need trees and flowers so the surrounding area must not be devastated. "I believe that beekeeping is the form of preservation of the third millennium," says Azevedo, who also recently graduated in Philosophy. The cost, which is not high, is also important for the beehives to spread around the country.

"The activity does not need fertilizers, grass cutting, pesticides and ploughing of the land, for example. Nature, in the case of beekeeping, is not the enemy that must be fought, modified, on the contrary, it is nature, in its bulk, that contributes to production of honey," he says.

And in the region this partnership is working out. And the business, within his philosophy of work, has been growing. Today, five people work directly with Mel de Teresópolis, another 10 indirectly, selling the product, for example.

The partnership with supermarket group Pão de Açúcar began three years ago, through program Caras do Brasil, which seeks small-scale suppliers who work with sustainable products, have environmental concerns, sustainable products and environmental and social concerns.

The process was not simple, but Azevedo crossed all phases and became a supplier to the chain. "This was an injection to the company, as they buy a large volume," said the businessman.

Azevedo's production is a mixture of artistic and industrial, a modality that has been greatly encouraged by the government of Brazil. Artistic in the way of production, in the concern with maintaining the characteristics of the product, of the region, but with regard to sanitary matters and to the control that a food product must have, Azevedo's business gains industrial characteristics.

"We are and want to be a family agro-industry, but today we know that things cannot work like they did in the past, when honey was sold in a glass bottle and it was all done by hand. Now it is different, we must have an appropriate package, follow standards and undergo sanitary inspection, for example. It is a matter of security," he explained.

Apart from honey, Mel de Teresópolis works with propolis, royal jelly, mixed honey (with therapeutic herbs, for example) and pollen. The latter, explained Azevedo, has characteristics that help in the treatment of anemia. "Each bee product has a beneficial application for animal health," he explained. He tells, for example, that honey is adding benefits to properties due to being produced in different trees.

"The honey produced from eucalyptus adds to the end product the active element of that plant, due to its nectar, so it is good against flu and has decongesting characteristics, for example," said Azevedo. Such aspect opens for companies another market, that of shops that sell natural and therapeutic products. Exports are not discarded but there is still a route to be followed, according to Azevedo. Partners to help Mel de Teresópolis take this step are welcome.

Mel de Teresópolis was among the products exhibited at fair O Brasil Rural Contemporâneo (The Contemporary Rural Brazil), a fair that took place in Rio de Janeiro at the end of last month. Around 10,000 products from all over the country were brought to the event, promoted at Marina da Glória.

The fair was organized by Brazil's Ministry of Agrarian Development and has been taking place for four years, always in Brasília. This is the first time that the event has left the federal capital.

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