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PP-534 [Beekeeping for Rural Development]

Beekeeping and opportunities in a Patagonian prison

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There is a penitentiary in the city of Cipolletti, Río Negro, in the Argentine Patagonia. Since 2018, a course-workshop has been held there to learn the beekeeping trade. It began with just a single swarm captured from a street tree, which was later converted into a hive for learning experiences. A sample of that first harvest, in February 2019, was sent to an international honey competition (Mercosur), winning first prize in its dark honey category. This recognition generated a careful and focused attention from society, as prison is not always seen as a place of opportunity and good news.

Learning and work are two pillars that can strengthen the self-esteem of a person incarcerated. In this northern region of Patagonia in particular, the spring and summer months allow students to explore the different stages of honey production, from the awakening of the hive to the arrival of autumn. The project provides a great incentive to think about the more or less immediate future, both for those leaving prison and for those who will spend a few more years there. It has allowed those who learned to have a trade and real employment opportunities upon release, considering that the area is a fruit-producing area that requires pollination for different species. Each student spends the course caring for a beehive, providing an opportunity for analysis, evaluation, and decision-making to solve problems. Their responsibility to care for the very lives of these bees for a year is at stake. Community harvesting brings with it the collective practice of sharing and joining forces for the common good, something that needs to be reflected upon and encouraged.

Furthermore, within the institution, we have apiaries for inmates who, thanks to their focus on production and the opportunities this activity provides, have found a significant investment of their time and dedication in a cause that both dignifies and motivates.

Beekeeping as an educational activity has provided tools to generate well-being, not only for inmates, but also for those around them, for the bees, and for the environment. Honey harvesting has been a sweet symbol in a hostile place that, even in its most difficult moments, finds nuances of hope in beekeeping education and production.

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There is a prison institution in Argentine Patagonia, in the city of Cipolletti, Río Negro. There, a beekeeping course-workshop has been held since 2018 where the beekeeping trade is learned. It began with just a swarm captured on the street, and from a pedagogical hive the quantity was multiplied, until there was one for each student. The first honey harvested, in February 2019, was sent to an international honey competition (Mercosur), obtaining the first prize in its category (dark honey). This recognition produced an attentive and focused look on the part of society, since prison is not always seen as a place of opportunities and good news. Learning and work are two pillars that can strengthen the self-esteem of a person deprived of liberty. In particular, in this northern area of Patagonia, the summer months allow one to go through the different stages of honey production, from the awakening of the hive in spring, until the arrival of autumn. The project is a great incentive to think about a more or less immediate future, for people who are released, or those who will spend a few more years inside. It has allowed those who learned and left prison as beekeepers to have a real trade and work. Also within the institution we have apiaries for prisoners who, thanks to their focus on production and the opportunities that this activity provides, have found a great investment of their time and dedication to a cause that dignifies them. Beekeeping as an activity has provided a real possibility for vulnerable people, who by having a trade and a job find tools for their own well-being, that of the human beings around them, that of the bees and also the environment itself. The honey harvest has been a beautiful and sweet symbol in a hostile place that, even in its most difficult side, finds hope in education and beekeeping production.