

# *Saint Lucia Aims to Preserve Its Bee Population*

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Castries, April 22 (teleSUR-RHC)-- William Antoine has been a beekeeper for over two decades. He is also the CEO of Saint Lucia's Mille Fleur Honey Producers Cooperative. With over 200 members, it is the island's sole umbrella body representing beekeepers. He is worried that honeybee populations on the island are dying off at increasingly rapid rates and honey is fast becoming a precious commodity.

"If you don't have bees on an island, it's a dead island. For agriculture, they do a lot of pollination and grafting," he said. He believes that the only way to address the issues facing beekeepers is through a collaborative effort. "Individually, we will not survive, but together we can do a lot. I think if we are selling together, we can control the price, because I am saying, as a beekeeper, to sell a bottle of honey for ECB\$40 – people sell it above that now, it is kind of expensive," he said.

Saint Lucia's Minister of Agriculture says it is time for the small countries of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States to enact the necessary legislation to protect the bee population. He says this is not a fringe issue that only affects beekeepers, but an entire industry, as agriculture depends on many types of insects, including honeybees, to pollinate its crops.

"While in many countries, what some people call developed countries, there are laws that protect bees and here there are many countries that have tremendous problems because they do not have enough bees at this stage. We in the Caribbean are very slow to pick up on things like that," he said. Experts say a number of factors are contributing to the decline including the use of agricultural chemicals and climate change. Former Magistrate Florita Nicholas has concluded a landmark study on apiculture in Saint Lucia and recently submitted her findings to the Ministry of Agriculture. She too, through her Act Now Generation Group, is calling for legislation to protect the bee industry. For small islands like Saint Lucia, the price of honey has already skyrocketed to \$36.80 a gallon. The beekeepers are worried that if things continue along these lines, hundreds of farmers will be pushed out of business.

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