

\$60 gets a beekeeper started and seeds future beekeepers in Kenya.

I join the journey to discover more of brown gold as solution to vulnerable groups and environmental conservation in motherland KISII. Samwel A. Maina, Kisii, Kenya

Just as a honeybee colony swarms to replicate itself and perpetuate the colony, beekeepers in Washington State and Kisii, Kenya have the chance to share beekeeping knowledge and expand sustainable beekeeping practices in East Africa.

Former Lewis County beekeeper Wilma Sofranko now lives in Kenya, and has founded the nonprofit KiReeCo, the Kisii Rural Education and Empowerment Coalition. KiReeCo teaches organic farming practices with a goal of alleviating poverty. An important part of the farming practice is sustainable beekeeping using Langstroth hives and having the farmers go through an intensive beekeeping training course.

Four members of the Lewis County Beekeepers Association -- Dave Gaston, Gary Stelzner, Thad Stelzner and Susanne Weil -- will travel to Kenya later this year to teach beekeeping to Kenyan farmers associated with KiReeCo. Those four Lewis County beekeepers are paying all of their own expenses to travel and stay in Kenya. Lewis County Beekeepers recently voted overwhelmingly to support this effort as a sanctioned club activity.

Last year, after getting the WSBA apprentice beekeeper training materials, 57 beekeepers finished the training in Kenya and began selling honey. Now, more than 500 others in the region want to keep bees. Money they raise from selling honey helps these subsistence farmers afford school for their children.

A revolving “Pay it Forward” fund is used to support this work. A \$60 donation to KiReeCo makes a full hive box for one beekeeping family. Other Kenyans build the boxes, benefitting even more families in the area. About 8 to 10 months after installing their hive, beekeepers there can expect to have their first harvest, with 3 to 4 more harvests available through the year. With the first harvest, the beekeeper pays for their hive. The initial \$60 donation is reinvested to build a hive box for another trained beekeeping farmer. KiReeCo extracts, markets and sells the honey for the farmer, responding to a strong demand for Kisii honey in the region and throughout Kenya.

Members of the KiReeCo U.S. Advisory Board are: Robin Gardner, Eatonville, WA; Joanie Falconer, Portland, OR; Debbie Lehman, Norwich, CN; and Fran Scott, Melbourne, FL. Other projects under KiReeCo include a seed bank, organic garden, mushroom house, water system, health clinic and community library.

For more details and if you wish to make a Paypal contribution, visit www.kireeco.wordpress.com or email kireeco@gmail.com