

[TENDENCIAS]

Produce miel en el desierto con abejas que se alimentan de planta venenosa

Edith Elgueta dejó veinte años de trayectoria municipal para desempeñarse como apicultora en el lugar más árido del mundo, donde escasean las flores. El éxito de su producto la ha llevado a exponer ante la ONU.

Ignacio Arriagada M.

En la década de los años setenta, Edith Elgueta quedó perpleja cuando se enteró que el Servicio Agrícola y Ganadero (SAG) fumigó grandes áreas de Arica, comuna donde residía, además de los valles de Azapa, Lluta y Codpa y los pueblos altiplánicos en el Desierto de Atacama a fin de acabar con la mosca de la fruta. Ella sabía que, además de liquidar a este insecto, este proceso iba a matar a las abejas, tal como sucedió.

“Las abejas preservan y conservan ecosistemas, por lo tanto después de haber sido acabadas se agudizó la gran sequía que había en Arica y el desierto se volvió mucho más seco”, reflexiona la mujer, hoy de 68 años.

Veinte años después, cuando Elgueta ya sumaba una dilatada trayectoria como funcionaria pública en dos municipios de las regiones Metropolitana y O’Higgins, la necesidad de comprobar esta hipótesis la condujo a estudiar sobre las abejas. Su primera experiencia fue en 2002, en un seminario realizado en Puerto Varas, donde conoció los efectos de este insecto, por ejemplo, en “el equilibrio del agua”.

“Cuando me puse a estudiar, en 2002, en paralelo yo tenía las ganas de dejar la ciudad y volver a un lugar libre de contaminación y conectada con lo natural (...) Apenas fui dándome cuenta de las bondades y la importancia de las abejas para el medioambiente, todo eso me marcó. Ahí decidí que quería dedicarme a la apicultura, puesto que vi una oportunidad de negocio y me permitía volver a mis orígenes, que era la naturaleza”, relata Elgueta.



EDITH ELGUETA PRESENTÓ AYER SUS PRODUCTOS EN LA EXPO CHILE AGRÍCOLA.

Totally convinced, Edith left her job and went to Argentina to train as a beekeeper at the National University of Cuyo, but she didn't do it, because she wanted to perform this millenary profession in a different way. She traveled to various institutions and cultures to learn about beekeeping.

NUEVO RUMBO

With the intention of applying the theory, she started in September 2003 with the raising of bees in Chépica, in the interior of the valley of Colchagua. As she stayed there until 2011 when she received a call from her daughter, who indicated that this insect was being seen again in the community and that, incredibly, they were being killed.

“Esa situación me hizo volver a Arica en enero de 2012, pero con la intención de concretar el negocio que quería, que era producir miel en pleno desierto. Presenté el proyecto en el cual solicitaba un terreno a Bienes Nacionales, pero lo rechazaron”, recuerda la emprendedora.



LA CHILCA, UNA PLANTA VENENOSA, ES POLINIZADA POR LAS ABEJAS.

At the root of the negative, Edith lost time and moved to Peru to study Natural Medicine at San Marcos University in Lima, where she perfected, in addition to her knowledge, the initiative that she wanted to carry out in her hometown.

On his return, in July 2014, he returned to enter his project to produce honey, this time, it was accepted, for which he rented a property in the Valle de Alluta, surrounded by aridity. “I received the approval and I traveled to Santiago to buy two hives and I brought them to Arica. I started with 6 hives. The people here saw me and they said that it was impossible to make honey, that it was a madness,

but I went forward”, says Elgueta. She baptized the pyme as “Colmeneras Pío Martín”. The first challenge she had to face was to find water. With the help of a pendulum she managed to find a subterranean reservoir where Chilca plants grow, which is toxic when eaten directly. She investigated and detected that with the pollen the bees make a honey free of heavy metals. The first sale of her product was in August 2014 at the Festival of the Choclo, in the Valle de Lluta. Edith explains that the production process is totally natural and implies “opening the hives as a function of climatic conditions and the lunar cycles, for example, if the lunar phase is growing, the honey is more acidic and more abundant”. Since its beginning,

CEDIDA

EXPO CHILE AGRÍCOLA

Colmeneras Pío Martín participated yesterday at the Expo Chile Agrícola, which organizes the Foundation of Communications, Training and Culture of the Agro (Fucoa). Its executive director, Claudio Urtubia, explained that “one of the objectives of the expo is to deliver training on key topics for agriculture and the rural world, together with disseminating various programs and benefits of the Ministry of Agriculture and its services in favor of the development of farmers, agricultural women and the rural world, as well as highlighting culture and our traditions”.

Colmeneras Pío Martín has received national and international recognitions and certifications. One of them is from the German Fraunhofer, which recognized that her honey has regenerative properties. In 2021, the Banco de Chile named her the Inspiraadora. In 2023, the Fundación Microfinanzas BBVA took her to the United Nations to expose about beekeeping in the driest world; and in 2024, the Ministry of Agriculture awarded her the Premio Siembra.

Currently, the entrepreneur produces honey only with 15 hives, and she delivers three to four kilograms. With that she could export other derivatives, which is propolis, to countries like Germany, Switzerland, Bolivia and Peru.

In the future, Edith Elgueta admits with much enthusiasm that she pretends to take honey to other markets in Europe and also to Arab nations. ☺