

Amrut Waghere

Kopurli village, Peth block, Nashik, Maharashtra

Amrut Waghere, a 42 year-old farmer and former carpenter, is among UTMT's most promising beekeepers in Maharashtra. He lives with his wife, teenage sons, 22-year old daughter and aged parents in Kopurli village 3.5 hours from Nashik city.

Amrut is passionate about anything he takes up. A highly skilled carpenter by profession, he is well known in the area, often sought after for a variety of carpentry related tasks. Soon after undergoing UTMT's Modi Trust-supported basic beekeeping training in 2013, he took the initiative to construct a beehive out of personal interest, without receiving training. UTMT staff spotted his talent, selecting him for a beehive making workshop with experienced beehive makers in Gujarat. Unfortunately, a chronic chest ailment diagnosed in 2012 forced him to give up carpentry. The family now relies mainly on income from selling the variety of agricultural produce they farm through the year, earning a tidy Rs. 50,000 annually.

Amrut was one of the first trainees in his batch to take up beekeeping. **He quickly learned from UTMT's technical assistant Chabildas Jadhav, the technique of catching bees from the wild and transferring them into his beehive**, the first phase of the learning curve. In this manner, he went on to fill 7 beehives in 2013, keeping them at various places on his five acre farm. Some hives rested near the vegetable garden where tomato, *vaal papdi* (flatbean), *doodhi* (bottle gourd) are cultivated for sale. The others stand in the patch of rice, wheat and peanut, and in the mango *wadi* (fruit orchard).



Waghere (left) and his son take turns to attend to the beehive

During the course of the year, **Amrut involved his sons and nephews in learning beekeeping**. They would often cluster around Chabildas on his monthly beehive checking visits, listening attentively to technical details of bee behavior they observed in the beehive each time. **This knowledge transfer has reduced the family's dependency on Amrut for technical skill, especially useful during the times**

Amrut travelled. As they the seasons progressed, they experienced the ups and downs that form part of the natural beekeeping cycle – honey extraction and bee colonies absconding (flying away) from the beehives. **The first honey flow season in May 2014 saw one kg honey extracted from their boxes, which they happily shared with family and friends.** In the monsoons that followed, 3 of the bee colonies absconded thereby reducing the number of filled boxes to 4. Both experiences are essential for any new beekeeper to hone his skill. The Wagheres feel it has helped deepen their understanding of bees, increasing their confidence in tackling this year's seasons better.



Amrut's family proudly displays their bounty of doodhi harvest

A year into the activity, Amrut witnessed what he so far only heard from UTMT staff about agriculture improvement being a far greater beekeeping benefit than honey. **The vaal papdi and doodhi harvests were 40% more than previous years. From the usual 5–6 potis of vaal harvested weekly for 2 months (1 poti is 70 kg), they now saw harvests of 7-8 potis per week.** At the local market rate of Rs. 500 per poti, the household earned Rs. 28,000, an increase of Rs. 8,000 over the previous Rs. 20,000.

The effect of the bees on doodhi is more interesting. **Apart from the higher yields, it is the qualitative changes that have taken them by surprise.** “In the market, there is a standard size which is in more demand. The doodhis that conform to this standard should fit into a standard sized transparent packet widely available, 1 bag per doodhi. **My doodhis were usually irregular shaped, too large or too long. This season's harvest was quite different: most of the gourds were evenly shaped, and fit easily into the market dictated transparent bag. We received a better price, compared to otherwise.**” The Waghere's earned around Rs. 35,000 from selling doodhi, a 30% increase from previous years.