



Meant to Bee

ENTREPRENEUR: Drienie Botes

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LOCATION: Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa

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“A lot of the time, smaller scale African beekeepers end up giving their honey away at the end of the season because they don't have buyers. I want to help change that. My goal is to get as many beekeepers as possible as meaningful partners who are personally invested in the business.”



Meant to Bee is a honey company which empowers small scale beekeepers with an introduction to the business, training and ongoing mentorship in sustainable beekeeping and access to market, all under a common brand.

Words and photography by Chris de Beer-Procter



ABOUT THE BUSINESS

Nature is full of real-life inspiration for the circular economy. For Drienie Botes, one need look no further than the mighty bee. These tiny creatures have been in the business of circularity long before it was a buzzword for us. “They’re incredible little beings that most of us don’t know much about,” says Drienie, who became fascinated by the business of beekeeping in 2018. “They’ve shown me that it takes extreme teamwork to be successful and serious commitment to your cause,” says Drienie.

After becoming captivated by bees and what she was learning about the honey industry, Drienie founded Meant to Bee, a honey company which hopes to enable small scale beekeepers for a much bigger scale vision. The cause she and her partner beekeepers have committed to is no small thing: they plan to put African honey



“When I started learning about circularity, I wondered how my work fit in. But it’s become clearer to me now that bees are more a part of the circular system than anything.”

on the map and encourage more farmers on the continent to integrate hives into their ecosystems.

“I don’t think people realise how important bees are to the food system,” says Drienie, “a third of the world’s food is pollinated by bees. If we don’t have bees, we don’t have food.” When bees pollinate crops, she tells me, yields can increase by 70-80%. Farming honey as a companion to many popular crops is a natural boost for farmers’ yield and business, but it could also benefit the surrounding communities and environment.

“I imagine that if we can grow the industry, we can pollinate more food,” says Drienie. “The knock-on effect will be huge.”

While Drienie appreciates the role bees play in our environment and food system, she also has big dreams for what they can do for Africa. According to the international entrepreneurship and sustainability program, SEED, Africa is the only continent where bee populations remain stable against the threat of diseases which endanger populations on other continents,

making it a prime location for beekeeping to flourish. But despite this, countries in Africa still import the majority of the honey they consume and even that is not enough to make up for the growing demand as consumers look to the product as a healthier alternative to sugar.

Drienie’s idea for filling that gap in the market is to empower black and previously disadvantaged beekeepers, partner with and support them as they build successful businesses. Drienie recognised the need after hearing about the experiences of black beekeepers in the industry. “I heard them asking for mentorship but no one wanted to mentor them,” she reflects. She realized that her skills could be shared with the wider beekeeping community. “I know how to

get into markets and how to create a brand, that’s my background,” she reflects.

Much like the way of the bee, Drienie’s organization will consist of a network of hives, each producing their own high-quality honey under the leadership of these partner beekeepers. But each part will work towards the good of the whole, towards building up a respected name for African honey both at home, and abroad for export markets. “My ultimate vision is to have an African brand,” she says. “I really believe that we can make a product that will stand amongst the best in the world. It’s my goal, my obsession. It’s my drive.”

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

“Next year we hope to have a harvesting truck that will be the first of its kind in Africa. My ultimate vision is for Meant to Bee to be an African brand that represents Africa, a ‘premier Africa’ brand. I want 40 000 hives and penetrate the SADC (Southern African Development Community) and then the entire continent!”



ADVICE ON CIRCULARITY FOR ENTREPRENEURS

“If we can learn anything from the bees, I think it’s teamwork. We need to stand together, work together and be committed to our cause.”

