

Guido's story

Beekeepers Sonia Chicao and her husband, Guido Guenupan, didn't allow the fact that neither of them drive to deter them from buying a truck with a loan from Apicoop. Instead, they paid for their 20-year-old son, Guido jnr, to learn to drive – providing him with work in an area where jobs for young people are scarce.



The family lives in Caunahue, a small community near Paillaco, where Apicoop is based. Around 20 people keep bees locally – about 10 began in 2006 – and six of them are members of Apicoop.

"We are buying the pick-up but neither of us drive so we have paid for our son, Guido, to have driving lessons so he will be the driver for the family," Guido snr said.

"It is very important to have transport. We have been moving our hives and bees with the oxen so we have to wait until afternoon or dark so we would not get stung by the bees.

"Our efficiency in beekeeping will no doubt increase once we have transport. Sometimes it has been raining here and the next day we found that our hives have swarmed and we lost 50%. Now we are going to be there every time when it is needed. We won't be depending on anybody."

Sonia described some of the problems they've faced. "There were times when we would make an agreement to hire a person with a car to take us to our bees 8kms from here and the person used to forget about us, so we had to walk all the way home.

"Our son Rodrigo (26) has started working with us and he owns 20 hives," she said. "Two years ago I would have thought with 100 hives we would be well enough, but today we are working as a family and we have 100. We are now wondering if we can think of having 500 hives."

Young people find it hard to get work locally, as Guido snr explained: "The boys are wanting to start keeping bees because they have hardly any alternatives for work here and beekeeping has proved to be a good opportunity. Most of the youth are going to the big cities.

"Of the five children we have, the eldest, Anibal, is working in Santiago and we have a daughter, Daisy who is living here now, but her husband has found work in Santiago as well. Once they take off for the big city it is difficult for them to come back and get used to the style of life in the countryside. They just get back for holidays.

"I have no doubt keeping bees was a good decision because now our main income is based on beekeeping. The bees look after us. We are depending almost 100% on the bees. If the season goes well, we are expecting to have five tons of honey.

"Everything you see here has been earned by the bees. I used to be a seasonal worker in the woods but in the end I didn't earn anything. With the beekeeping we have enough money to give our kids education."

On being asked what would happen if Apicoop did not exist, Guido replied: "The best we could do would be to sell locally, but we would be able to sell only about one ton. There were times here when there were beekeepers but they all quit because there was no market. If there was no Apicoop to buy the honey, it would not make sense that we worked in this.

"Until a couple of years ago we were not very skilled in beekeeping techniques. This year, so far we have not lost a single bee hive and our hope is that it will continue this way – that we do not lose any bees and we can increase, because if the bees are healthy we will be as well."

The couple are also looking at Apicoop's blueberry developments and thinking about diversifying.

"I have got six hectares of flat land about 15kms from Paillaco," Sonia said. "I wish to do something with this piece of land that would help it to increase our income – maybe blueberries?"

"We are very grateful for the opportunity that this fair trade market has given us and we would like to encourage people to continue. Every time they buy our honey it means a lot to us."

Guido jnr, who graduated from high school in 2006, said: "I like driving. I'm looking forward to working with the family."

About Apicoop

Apicoop sells honey for its 120 members in the eastern region of Valdivia, and for about 500 other beekeepers elsewhere in the country. All export sales are to fair trade organisations. Honey from Apicoop is used in our Geobars.

Beekeepers for Apicoop talk freely about the huge difference fair trade benefits have made to their lives. They have access to low-interest loan schemes,

and the opportunity to share resources and experience to develop their honey-producing capacity and increase their standard of living.

Buy fair trade honey

You can [buy honey from Apicoop on our webstore](#).

Want to visit this producer group?

- [Take our Meet the People tour to Chile and see the benefits of fair trade firsthand.](#)