

Putting away the toxic spray

A school dropout, 28-year-old Simarjeet Singh Aulakh from Punjab's Faridkot district now gives lessons in beekeeping. One of the four farmers from Punjab to be honoured by the Union Agriculture Ministry this year, Aulakh started off with two bee boxes in 1992 and is now a successful entrepreneur with as many as 150 bee boxes. He is presently planning to export honey. Aulakh has been long been practising what exporters are now teaching bee farmers in the state — clean bee colonies do not need antibiotics.

With Punjab's main exports coming under scrutiny in Europe for alleged "higher than permissible residue level" of pesticide in Basmati and antibiotics in honey, exporters are now cautious.

Country's largest honey exporter, Ludhiana-based Kashmir Apiaries, has an SOS helpline number for its 15,000-odd farmers across the country. "Farmers use antibiotics to destroy mites that attack bee colonies. But its residue also comes in honey. Though we have hi-tech labs to check every export consignment so that there is no trace of antibiotic residue, at the same time we are holding regular seminars for farmers to highlight the harmful effects of antibiotics. We have a group of 25 scientists to educate beekeepers about organic sprays for dealing with mites and techniques such as drone killing method which can prevent the need to spray antibiotics in bee colonies," says Sehzada Singh, son of Jagjit Singh Kapoor, CMD, Kashmir Apiaries. The SOS service of the company, which recorded a turnover of Rs 220 crore last year from exports to 48 countries worldwide, helps farmers reach experts at its beekeeping institute in hours of crisis. Their basic lesson for all — prevention is the only cure when it comes to exports.

