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Where paint protects pollinators

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In an exclusive ***AgroSpectrum interview, Mark Titus, President â?? Decorative Coatings Business at Nippon Paint India***, shares how the companyâ??s foray into apiculture goes beyond diversification to reflect a purpose-driven, ESG-led innovation strategy. He highlights how eco-friendly, GreenPro-certified coatings are being adapted to ensure hive durability while safeguarding bee healthâ??an uncommon intersection of material science and biodiversity.

Emphasizing measurable impact, Titus points to metrics like colony health, hive longevity, and farmer income uplift as key indicators of success. He underscores that the initiative is â??impact-first but not impact-only,â? with a long-term vision to build a scalable, self-sustaining ecosystem through strong partnerships and rural engagement.

This move takes Nippon Paint into apicultureâ??far outside traditional coatings demand. How do you frame this internally: adjacent market expansion, ESG-led innovation, or a long-term rural strategy bet?

We see our association with Humble Bee as a natural adjacency, driven by both purpose and capability. While it sits outside traditional coatings demand, it meaningfully leverages our core strengths in protective and sustainable coatings. For us, this is also an ESG-led innovation with strong long-term potential for rural impact. Itâ??s less about diversification for scale, and more about extending our relevance into ecosystems where durability and sustainability truly matter.

Many companies talk sustainability; few quantify it. What hard metrics will define success here - colony health, hive longevity, farmer income uplift, or something else entirely?

Sustainability and responsible innovation are deeply embedded in Nippon Paintâ??s DNA. Guided by our ESG framework, we are committed to developing solutions that not only deliver performance but also create measurable environmental and social value. This initiative is a strong reflection of that approach where businesses, communities, and ecosystems grow together.

From an ESG standpoint, success will be defined through clear metrics such as colony health and bee retention rates (Environmental), hive longevity and durability (Environmental), and improvements in honey yield and farmer income (Social).

Coatings for beehives introduce a completely different performance benchmarkâ??biological compatibility. What were the toughest technical trade-offs in ensuring durability without compromising bee health?

At Nippon Paint India, eco-friendly, low to zero-VOC formulations have always been integral to our portfolio, and we are among the few in the industry to offer GreenPro-certified products - an eco-label awarded by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) that recognises products meeting stringent environmental and sustainability standards across their lifecycle.

We have leveraged our existing formulation of paints that are eco-friendly and highly durable to withstand harsh weather conditions - to coat the hives. Its proven durability against extreme climates and moisture make it an ideal solution, while ensuring the highest standards of environmental safety.

While traditional coatings are primarily designed for protection, in this case, we also had to ensure zero harmful emissions and no disruption to bee behavior or their habitat - something we were able to achieve seamlessly with our eco-friendly, GreenPro-certified product.

Reaching first-generation women farmers and tribal communities is notoriously difficult. Does Nippon Paint plan to build new distribution channels, or will this rely entirely on partners like Humble Bee?

At Nippon Paint India, initiatives like NShakti - our pioneering program that empowers women to become professional painters - reflect our strong commitment to enabling self-reliance among women. This shared vision of empowerment makes it even more relevant for us to support such novel initiatives.

Enabling sustainable livelihood opportunities for tribal women is a natural extension of this commitment.
We also recognize that last-mile access is critical, especially when engaging with first-generation women farmers and tribal communities. At this stage, our approach is entirely partnership-led - working closely with organizations like Humble Bee that bring deep community connect and on-ground expertise.
The focus is on trust-led adoption, not just reach. We are keen to collaborate with like-minded partners who share our vision, as we collectively work towards building a more sustainable and inclusive ecosystem for livelihoods.

Is this initiative designed to become a self-sustaining business line, or will it remain impact-first with limited margin expectations? Where do you draw the line between profitability and purpose?

This initiative is impact-first but not impact-only. Our goal is to build a self-sustaining model over time. In the early stages, the priority was on ecosystem building and demonstrating proof of impact and, currently, we are supporting this through a subsidized approach. Over the long term, we expect the model to achieve viability through scale and operational efficiencies. For us, profitability and purpose are not mutually exclusive - they must converge to create sustainable, long-term value.

Low-VOC, eco-friendly coatings are not proprietary in isolation. What makes this model defensibleâ??is it the formulation, the ecosystem partnerships, or early-mover advantage in apiculture infrastructure?

While low-VOC coatings in themselves are not unique, what is far more difficult to replicate is the ecosystem approach. Our GreenPro certification gives us a clear edge, reinforcing the environmental credibility of our products. Additionally, our partnership-led model, combined with early on-ground learnings, enables us to build deep insights and create a strong first-mover advantage in this space.
At its core, this initiative is driven by a shared vision to build a sustainable ecosystem through innovation aligned with Nippon Paintâ??s core DNA. The new-age beehive model by Humble Bee makes this partnership seamless, enabling a differentiated approach and laying the foundation for long-term impact.

Does this signal a broader ambition for Nippon Paint India to move into agri-linked applicationsâ??storage, irrigation infrastructure, rural housingâ??or is apiculture a one-off experiment?

This is certainly a strategic learning ground for us, reinforcing how coatings can play a meaningful role in protecting infrastructure beyond urban environments.

Our approach remains tightly aligned to the relevance of this initiative. We will scale thoughtfully - guided by proven impact and clear outcomes, rather than pursuing expansion into new areas. For us, this is not about entering a new category; itâ??s about applying our expertise where it can create the most meaningful and lasting impact.

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