



Cows of all breeds will be part of Milk4Life herds

# Milk for life

by Liza Burger

**The dream of supplying healthy milk to rural communities, while earning a milk cheque and improving herd health is exactly what the Milk4Life project proposes.**

Similar projects have been implemented with great success in countries such as Uganda, Kenya and India, says Kotie Annandale, a well-known mentor of the Milk Producers' Organisation (MPO), entrepreneur and dairy farmer with a great passion for sharing his experience, skills and knowledge.

Kotie and his company, 3 Roses Dairies, developed the Milk4Life project, which is designed to develop emerging farmers to ensure that they eventually participate in the mainstream economy. The biggest motivator behind the Milk4Life project is to assist subsistence farmers and communal herdsmen get the most out of their cattle and to teach willing participating livestock owners the basics of farming with milk and herd management.

## **More support needed**

Since three possible projects were identified in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo last year, only Limpopo has included the Milk4Life concept in a feasibility study for establishing a dairy in the Moletsi area (between Polokwane and Dendron). The feasibility study will look at the application of a commercial dairy farm, the Milk4Life concept, a milk depot set-up and the probable success rate of each.

"I'm very disappointed by the lack of government support for this project," says Kotie. He continues explaining how he gave a proposal of the Milk4Life project in the hands of the minister of agriculture, forestry and fisheries, Tina Joemat-Petterson. He adds that more provincial governments should support this project that will create jobs, increase food security and empower small-scale cattle farmers.

## How communities can benefit

In the mean time, he is excited about the prospect of the community of Moletsi benefiting from the programme if the province supports the concept. “In the greater Moletsi area, there are 108 villages with an average of 500 households each. There are thousands of heads of cattle, but very little management, especially regarding health,” says Kotie.



Kotie Annandale

The project will see basic communal milking parlours built at identified locations. Livestock owners will be encouraged to bring their cows (of any breed) to these communal milking parlours at the end of each day, where cows will be separated from their calves until after milking early the next morning. While at the holding yard, the cows will be fed quality roughage and concentrate feed to encourage better milk production. This will also enable farmers to do cursory health checks on their stock. The daily herding will also make it easier to administer vaccinations and state veterinary services will be enabled to do brucellosis and tuberculosis test.

Each farmer will be responsible for milking his own cows and will be paid his milk cheque at the end of each month or week after deductions for the use of water, electricity, feed and concentrate as well as other expenses for the management of the milk parlour. An additional feedlot for cull cows and bull calves, and facilities to castrate bull calves, will increase the chances of successful sales and better prices for cattle in general. “If these herds can receive TB and CA certificates, it will be possible to produce milk for human consumption.”

Even low-producing cows (4 to 6 ℓ per day) will provide a farmer with a welcome extra income. If he has 10 cows in milk, this means an income of about R100 a day (milk price at R2,00 for an average 5 ℓ) before deductions. “However, I believe that the very high butterfat content of these herds will be able to reach a price of R3,00,” says Kotie. With about half of the milk cheque going towards expenses, the owner of 10 cows in milk can look forward to a substantial additional income per month. “The plan is to add value to the milk by sending it to a processing depot. Pasteurised fresh milk and amasi will initially be the basic products produced for local consumption.

## Support from the MPO

As part of its support to the programme, the MPO will provide training and support mentorships for Milk4Life projects. During the mentorship period of about 36 months, monthly reports of each farmer will be compiled to track progress and to identify potential commercial dairy farmers who can apply for state funding. The remaining farmers, who do not want to become commercial farmers or do not qualify as such, can continue to participate in the Milk4Life project as subsistence farmers.

For more information on Milk4Life, contact Kotie Annandale on 082 576 6458. 