



The wonder of the **milk goat**

by Fidelis Zvomuya

Emerging farmers in Limpopo have realised that milk goats can be “wonder animals” that can provide an easy pathway out of poverty.

According to Francina Moloto of Makibelo Village in Limpopo, milk goats can be kept on a marginal piece of land and reproduce very quickly. This means that farmers can build up a herd in no time and get a return on their investment soon.

Francina is a member of the Gopeng Makibelo Dairy Goat Project. The 36 female farmers who are members of the project, are supported by the international non-governmental organisation, Heifer International.

Opportunities from milk goats

Moloto says that these animals have changed the lives of the project's members. The animals handle easily, are easy to transport, are not expensive to buy and to feed, and are easy to house. The changes have been so big, that many more people want to join the project.

"Dairy goat farming offers opportunities for profitable and sustainable diversification on our small farms, especially in the past when our maize crop was affected by drought," she says.

The farmers use the goat manure to fertilise their gardens. The milk is used to feed their families and some is sold. The money from the goats' milk is used to buy farm inputs and to send their children to school.

Moloto says that dairy goats are not a specialised enterprise, and easily became an integral part of their mixed farming activities: "Goats can be kept on a small piece of land. They need a well-constructed house, with a good roof and a raised floor. The floor should have slats that allow droppings and other dirt to fall through and allow air to circulate and keep the animals dry."

Heifer International

The female farmers were introduced to dairy goats in 2005. Heifer International donated 12 goats to 12 farmers and taught them about production techniques, animal management and milk handling.

The number of participants has increased to 36 through the organisation's "Passing on the Gift" concept. This concept means that a family which receives a goat, must give the first female offspring of that goat to the next family. They must also teach the next family to care for the goat.

Heifer International Limpopo manager, Johannes Maledi, says that before the initiative was launched, the farmers were farming with only maize and other crop production that require expensive inputs such as fertiliser.

Potential to grow

Maledi says that goats are cheaper to rear, have a high milk yield and are less labour intensive. "It is our hope that if more farmers join the project, then we will be able

to switch from raw milk sales to value addition. This means that we will create more competition,” he says.

Maledi believes that the growing market for dairy products shows great potential for value-added products such as yoghurt, fermented milk, whipped cream and cheese, but regulations and high costs mean that it is not an easy road to take.

The goats kept by the farmers are mainly cross-breeds between the so-called “exotic temperate” and the indigenous breeds.

Learning about goats

Heifer International used unit level training as the basis from which they trained and taught the farmers about best practises, how to ensure quality during milking, feeding their goats in a way that would guarantee maximum milk yield, common diseases that may affect goat milk productivity, the administration of drugs and milk withdrawal periods (when the goat gives less milk) after treatment.

Training was also given in fodder development and conservation. Farmers were also taught how to recognise good genes and improve genotype. In this sense they were trained in judging and inspection, breeding improvement, goat production and management, as well as record-keeping.

“Once our milk production is high enough, we hope to add value to the milk, so that we can increase the shelf life and get even better prices for our milk,” says Moloto. [Um](#)



Dairy goats can be kept on a small piece of land and in well-constructed housing