



A young boy assists his mother in the milking of cows in Marirangwe

# It is quality that counts

by Fidelis Zvomuya

**For smallholder dairy farming to succeed, there is a need for resources to be available, an increase in production levels, quality production, good management practices, market facilities and a socio-economic environment conducive for farmers to operate in, says Gumisai Chipunza, deputy chairperson of a Zimbabwe smallholder dairy farming project.**

Chipunza says dairy farming is a demanding business that requires proper farming skills, cooperation by all stakeholders and commitment from farmers. "We must not make excuses based on the economic and production challenges that our country is facing at the moment. This is not a passport to bad and poor milk production. As farmers we need to come up with measures that will see our products improving during these trying times, through the introduction of good professional farming practices," he said.

The 36-member Marirangwe Milk Collection Centre was established in 1984 by a government-run Dairy Development Programme (DDP). The project collapsed due to poor technical support, lack of funding and the unavailability of proper generic breeds.

The NADF took over the project three years ago and started providing the remaining 24 farmers with all the necessary support, including a restocking programme. Each farmer has an average of seven milk cows that give them about nine litres of milk per day. During peak time, especially during December to March, the farmers supply the centre with a total of 950 litres per day which is then delivered to Kefalos Cheese Products.



Members of the Marirangwe Milk Collection Centre. Each farmer has an average of seven milk cows giving them about nine litres of milk per day

According to Chipunza, at the moment they are not concerned about quantity, but quality. “It doesn’t make economic sense for you to have cows that give you 30 litres per day of poor quality milk, which will fetch very little or will be refused on the market. It is better for our cows to give us fewer, but good quality products,” he said.

Michael Manyanya, Kefalos factory manager, said that Marirangwe delivers some of the best quality milk, much better than some of the commercial farms that have been in business for a long time. Manyanya said that as a processing plant, they are happy that small-scale farmers are above the required quality, considering the current economic hardships and shortages being faced by the country’s farmers.

“Milk quality is very important and getting such a product from emerging farmers is an encouraging development, considering what farmers are going through at the moment,” he said.

Chipunza said the challenges they are facing are power cuts, sky-rocketing feed prices, poor generic breeds, transport and the lack of a milk-drinking culture within their area. “Due to the current national electricity blackout, at one time we lost close to 600 litres of raw milk. It all went bad before we could get diesel to transport it to the processor. We don’t have a generator at the centre and we cannot afford to buy one. Even if we had one, fuel is still a big problem,” he said.

The farmers, however, complimented the support they are getting from the NADF. “The farming association is providing us with technical assistance, training in milk production, handling, hygiene, record keeping, pasture establishment, animal health and quality control at our milk collection site,” Chipunza said.

The NADF is assisting with three projects – Marirangwe, Tsonzo and Rusitu – which were previously managed by the now semi-dead government-run Dairy Development Programme. Farai Tinarwo, NADF extension officer, said his organisation’s aim is to improve the productivity of smallholder dairy projects through the promotion of improved and innovative livestock feeding technologies.

Tinarwo said smallholder dairy farming has enormous potential. “It can contribute to family income, generate gainful employment, elevate living standards, fight malnutrition and can enhance processes of sustainable agriculture,” he said. Ajs Kirk, NADF chairperson, said one of their strategic goals as an association is to incorporate and develop small-scale producers. **UM**