



Smallholder Dairy Farming: A Solution to Low Milk Production in Zimbabwe



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Abstract

Thirty-five years after the smallholder dairy farming program was initiated, milk intake is still below average in Zimbabwe. Several reasons have been identified to limit optimum milk production and these include: inappropriate breeds, inadequate feed supply, lack of government support, cost of production, poor marketing channels, poor disease control methods, inadequate infrastructure, weak extension support, lack of farmer involvement in production planning, poor social relations between farmers and management. Regrettably none of the limitations have been adequately addressed within the context of a smallholder dairy farmer; therefore, the initiative has not been fully tested for or against. The reliance on well-wisher funds by local authorities in this farming sector cannot be a solution to improving milk production. There is need for control mechanism and proper budgeting of available funds towards capacitating of smallholder dairy farmers.

Keywords: Smallholder; Dairy production; Milk deficit

Abbreviations: DDP: Dairy Development Program; ARDA: Agricultural and Rural Development Authority; NORAD: Norwegian Agency for Development; DANIDA: Danish International Development Agency; PSIP: Public Sector Investment Program; HP: Heifer Project International

Introduction

The demand for milk and milk products in Zimbabwe has been growing over time in synergy with population growth. This trend has outweighed production potential which is currently at 54.3million liters against a demand of 120million liters per annum [1] for over three decades and until now per capita milk consumption remains below world average. The country used to produce 262million liters per annum [2]. In a bid to increase milk output the Zimbabwean government introduced the small-scale dairy farming schemes in 1983 under the Dairy Development Program (DDP). The Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (ARDA) was mandated to spearhead commercialization of this project. At inception, the program was funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development (NORAD), Africa Now (UK), the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), Heifer Project International (HP) and the Government of Zimbabwe through the Public Sector Investment Program (PSIP) [3-5]. This developmental program mainly concentrated in the medium to high rainfall areas of Zimbabwe [6,7].

In 1998, the program was then extended to semiarid areas, which were initially described as unsuitable for dairy farming [8]. In addition, the development efforts in these semiarid areas targeted resettled farms that had potential to grow fodder

as it was the major factor limiting smallholder dairy farming [9,10]. Thirty-five years after these initiatives per capita milk consumption has dwindled, and national milk production has gone down by more than 50% making the country a net importer of milk and dairy products. There is therefore needing to revisit the initiatives with the aim of improving milk production throughout the country.

Discussion

Dairying in the smallholder sector is practiced for reasons other than profit making, which are feeding the family, to produce manure to support crop production and to provide dairy animals as insurance, for financing emergency cash needs and for social status [11] then, surplus milk can be sold to nearby markets. From a smallholder dairy farmers' perspective, dairying assists farmers to diversify, spread farming risks and creates opportunity to make use of idle resources like crop residues [5]. This was not the governments' intention for this initiative. There could be several reasons for this farmers' approach including but not limited to failure to conceptualize the business model, lack of adequate support from private and public partners [12], inappropriate breeds [13] cost of production [14], and poor milk yields [15].

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