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TranZDVC Bulletin

The newsletter for the Transforming Zimbabwe's Dairy Value Chain for the Future (TranZDVC) project

NOVEMBER 2020

TranZDVC
Transforming Zimbabwe's Dairy Value Chain for the Future

FROM THE PROJECT COORDINATOR

We welcome all the readers of the TranZDVC Bulletin, the newsletter of We Effect's Transforming Zimbabwe's Dairy Value Chain for the Future (TranZDVC) project. I am glad to mention that TranZDVC is making headway in addressing key challenges that are being experienced within the dairy value chain. Indeed, it has been a challenge operating under the shadow of the COVID- 19 pandemic. The efforts of the TranZDVC partners and stakeholders continued under strict adherence to the Ministry of Health and Child Care and World Health Organisation COVID-19 guidelines.

One of the project's key components is the matching grants facility meant to leverage private sector funding applications, focusing on improving service provision to small-scale dairy farming enterprises. The facility pushes for investments in dairy productive assets and infrastructure and to address some of the bottlenecks and or underlying challenges within the dairy value chain in Zimbabwe.

In this newsletter, we carry inspirational stories from small-scale dairy producers to demonstrate that, with adequate support and effective strategies, we are on the right path to boost Zimbabwe's milk production. Across TranZDVC's areas of operation, we are witnessing, first hand, the impacts of the matching grants, with farmers investing in water access facilities powered by renewable energy and on-farm fodder production to reduce feed cost.

Following the successful importation of in-calf heifers from South Africa, we have also worked with five largest milk processors in Zimbabwe, as matching partners in the heifer facility who have distributed the heifer across the country. These are Dendairy, Dairibord Zimbabwe Limited, Kefalos, Prodairy and Nestle.

We also feature an update on TranZDVC's on the fodder production activities where farmers have been capacitated to to produce, process and preserve their own feed, for use during the dry season.

Finally, this issue covers work undertaken by TranZDVC with the Chitomborwizi Dairy Network on good animal husbandry practices, improved information on market opportunities, milk aggregation, and linking the farmers to credit institutions.

As always, we welcome your feedback on this, and other issues of the newsletter.

Dr Edson Chifamba, TranZDVC Project Coordinator

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Increased Incomes and Attractive Market for Chitomborwizi Dairy Farming Network

Smallholder farmers of Chitomborwizi Dairy Network at Portlet Farm in Makonde district in Mashonaland West Province, are excited following their participation in the TranZDVC project aimed at transforming their farming enterprises.

TranZDVC started working with the Chitomborwizi Dairy Network in 2019. Specific interventions focus on good animal husbandry practices, improved information on market opportunities, milk aggregation, and linking the farmers to credit institutions. Following these interventions, the membership has grown from 449 to 515. Some of the new dairy farmers do not have dairy cows as yet, but 21 farmers accessed cows through the project's Matching Grant Facility. They, however, attend trainings to gain the knowledge on animal husbandry in preparation for the expected dairy cows.

The Chitomborwizi Milk Collection Centre has noted an increase in aggregated milk in January and February this year compared with a similar period last year, despite the dry spell this year. What's more, milk loss has dramatically declined thanks to scaled up hygiene practices, reducing the amount of rejected milk.

The Chitomborwizi Milk Collection Centre

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As a typical partner with TranZDVC, the Chitomborwizi Dairy Network has started receiving technical assistance to access new financial services for its members, training in handling systems to reduce spoilage, access to new equipment, and additional market linkages. The Network is also keen to raise its profits through improvements in milk quality, increased capacity and higher productivity, leading to lower processing costs. Production of added value products, including cheese and butter, is also in their business plan.

"This kind of exposure is one approach the TranZDVC project is taking towards improving farmers' livelihoods through higher incomes as well as providing a complete package of technical assistance required for expansion of smallholder dairy production.," said John Crawford, owner of Portlet Farm and member of the Network.

Accessing inputs and credit

The primary constraint facing smallholder dairy farmers in Zimbabwe is lack of capital to invest in cows with high genetic potential and labour-saving equipment to make their milk more competitive. As they expand their herds they also lack credit to purchase supplementary feeds. Farmers partnering with TranZDVC now have the opportunity to access a complete package of commercialization tools including credit, technical assistance, market linkages, infrastructure, and training depending on their individual needs. Dairy business development is involving input suppliers, animal health service providers and milk traders in partnerships with smallholder producers that provide new market opportunities along the entire value chain.

Taking feed to the Chitomborwizi Milk Collection Centre

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Chitomborwizi farmers benefitted from a 42-panel solar system enabling them to bulk and chill their milk.

Through the Matching Grant Facility, the Association has benefitted from a 42-panel solar system enabling them to cool their milk value chain. Before TranZDVC support, the Association used a diesel generator which consumed 35 litres of diesel a day, translating to US$40.00 per day. They also benefitted from a silage cutter and three solar powered boreholes that are being used by three of its members on their demonstration plots in their different clusters. This is enabling the farmers to irrigate maize to be used for silage. Chitomborwizi Dairy Network Association Coordinator, Claudious Burira, said his Association has 400 dairy beasts on four clusters on farms in Chitomborwizi.

Ensuring quality and safety

While the current milk marketing system is successful in supplying rural and urban consumers throughout the country with fresh milk on a daily basis, the quality of the milk is variable.

The microbial load is often higher than the official standards, and in general, traders have little awareness of food safety standards. Raising milk quality standards will enhance market access, increase net returns of Chitomborwizi smallholder dairy farmers over the medium term, and have a positive nutritional impact on consumers.

TranZDVC, in partnership with government entities and local companies, is supporting interventions that will enable Chitomborwizi farmers to bulk and chill their milk as soon as it is collected.

This will raise quality standards and reduce postharvest losses. Farmers and traders will also be offered training on best practices for milk handling and storage that will contribute to achieving higher food safety standards and quality throughout the milk chain.

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Dairy Cows Present New Sources of Income

Claudious Burira feeding his dairy cows at his Chitomborwizi Farm in Makonde district, Mashonaland West Province.

The path to overcoming poverty is steep and lined with numerous obstacles. For many rural Zimbabwean households, small-scale agriculture production is the only viable income source, and eking out a living on small plots with limited access to inputs, credit, and markets is difficult at best.

To help smallholders overcome these obstacles, TranZDVC introduced matching grants to offer assistance to purchase dairy cows in project-supported communities. Production specialists then worked hand – in- hand with beneficiary farmers to introduce livestock management and feeding practices that result in healthy, productive cows.

Claudius Burira, of Chitomborwizi small-scale farming area in Makonde district in Mashonaland West Province, received six heifers this year from the Matching Grant Facility. He had already started attending project trainings. In just a few months, he had learnt how to better take care of cows to increase milk production at his farm. He constructed a covered area for the cows, began preparing his own feed instead of purchasing it, and started monitoring the cows' nutritional intake. He is growing leucaena, a legume fodder crop that grows in tropical and subtropical environments. Leucaena provides high quality feed for ruminant animals that boosts live weight gain both per animal and per hectare, compared to grass-only pastures.

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Farmer Claudious Burira (left, in blue work suit), and Tapiwanashe Dhewa, of Zimbabwe Association of Dairy Farmers (ZADF), inspecting a lecena fodder crop at Burira's farm.

Thanks to these improved techniques, Burira and his family began seeing dramatic improvements in milk production. Burira has a 22 dairy herd (14 cows, six heifers, two in-calf). They used to milk four cows per day, with each cow producing an average of 16 litres of milk a day, a number that has increased to 30 litres per cow a day. Milking eight cows now, the daily production translates to 300-350 litres of milk a day and sells at US$0.38 per litre. The family is guaranteed at least US$3,900.00 in milk sales every month.

"TranZDVC has helped me improve my dairy farming through the provision of better cow breeds and solar powered borehole. One of the project's key interventions is linking farmers with commercial suppliers and buyers, and this has seen my income grow," said Burira.

He adds: "The dairy cow scheme leads to more income as quality animals produce more milk as opposed to poor, indigenous breeds."

With the increased income, the Burira family is investing in other income-generating activities, including high-value vegetable production. They also plan to process some of the milk into higher-value dairy products to sell to local markets.

Burira and his family are a true testament to TranZDVC's integrated approach to improving incomes and nutrition. The family is participating in a number of other project activities, including health and nutrition trainings and natural resources management.

The dairy cow project is proving to be a successful way to bring family members into income-generating activities. The activity is so popular in Makonde district, offering farmers the initial investment to buy cows, and then linking them to appropriate trainings and technical assistance.

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Small-scale Dairy Farmers taking Dairying as a Serious, Family Business

Rusere weighing dry feed at his farm.

Dairy farming plays a critical economic and nutritional role in the lives of many smallholder farmers working with TranZDVC.

Zimbabwe's small-scale industry lacks quality service providers, as well as access to the necessary farming skills, inputs, technology, and electricity. As a result, smallholder farmers are missing out on the prospects of increasing their incomes from milk production.

To address these issues, TranZDVC is training dairy farmers – through partnering with the Zimbabwe Association of Dairy Farmers (ZADF) countrywide on fodder production, especially on appropriate drying and preservation of fodder and pasture grasses, mainly focusing on hay and silage making.

The project has also trained farmers on how to mix the dried fodder with other feeds as well as preserving surplus fodder for use during the dry season. Farmers who have adopted the increased use of dry feeds have, on average, raised milk productivity by about four litres per cow.

Taona Rusere, of Tadence Farming Private Limited, in Marirangwe area in Chikomba district, in Mashonaland East Province, has won the ZADF's top award of Small-scale Dairy Farmer of the Year for 2019, just three years after venturing into commercial dairying.

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Resources, such as hay, are critical to the success of dairy farming. Here, Rusere's hay feed in a shed at his farm.

"It's critical for dairy farmers to access resources as well as financial and market linkages," Rusere observed. "One needs to get his/her model right from the start – you shouldn't shift mid-stream. For example, you need to use the right model in your feeding regime, breeding and milking processes."

In line with this, Rusere's milking system is mechanized, and he uses zero grazing, and artificial insemination in breeding so as to be effective with the dairy herd. "Record keeping should also be up to date, he said. "I have also taken dipping seriously as one of my key success factors in dairy farming."

Through his participation in TranZDVC project, Rusere had a change of fortunes. He benefitted five dairy cows under TranZDVC's Matching Grant Facility, a solar powered borehole and now has enough stock feeds for his cows.

He is milking 19 cows and producing 400-450 litres a day. Plans are underway to increase production to 500 litres of milk per day, especially during the wet season. Rusere is continuously learning from TranZDVC's approach of demonstrating effective, efficient, and profitable ways to feed dairy cows.

Rusere is also working on a project to reduce input costs through on-farm feed production. Rusere continues to take advantage of TranZDVC's training programmes on animal husbandry, business and marketing management. All this helped him to scoop the overall winner of the Small-scale Dairy Farmer for the year, 2019.

The Small-scale Dairy Farmer of the Year judging process involved a three judge as panel visiting farmers across the country who had been adjudged as regional winners.

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Rusere is his maize field. He uses the maize products to reduce inputs costs through on-farm feed production.

The Small-scale Dairy Farmer of the Year judging process involved a three judge as panel visiting farmers across the country who had been adjudged as regional winners. The judges conducted interviews with the participants to test their knowledge on particular dairying systems and then independently scoring them. The places visited were Marirangwe, Nharira, Tsonzo, Rusitu, Hamaruomba, Umzingwane, Gokwe and Chikwaka. The whole process took two weeks. Judging was in three categories of farmers, the Farmer of the year, the Woman in Dairy and the Youth in Dairy. All categories were scored using exactly the same criteria.

Main highlights of the judges' comments included the general condition of the animals which appeared reasonable in Marirangwe, Nharira, Tonzo and Rusitu. Dairying infrastructure could be improved, especially among farmers who had been in dairying for a long time. They still had the 1980s style parlours. For all the years in dairy, no improvements have been made, the judges said.

"Quite a significant number of the participants did not have good animal sheds to protect animals from heat stress. Milking procedures appear to be well known by the farmers although a few of them used plastic utensils," said the judges' report.

Only three farmers participating in the competition had silage at the time of judging. This showed inadequate fodder flow planning. Farmers generally were making insufficient silage to last at most four months. After the silage ran out, farmers relied on commercial feeds - a very expensive way of feeding dairy animals. The farmers, added the report, also knew the qualities of good hay and how it is made, nevertheless only a few had good hay, bought from elsewhere

"A business focus was clearly lacking especially among old farmers who had been in dairying for many years, " said the judges.

Overall, the judges recommended training and technical assistance in dairy business management for the farmers.

CONTACT DETAILS

We Effect Zimbabwe | 221 Fife Avenue, Harare, Zimbabwe | +263 242 700 136
E-mail: edson.chifamba@weeffect.org | www.zagp.org.zw/Projects/Details/2
Twitter: @ZagpDairy