

Experts led by Dr Constantine Katongole advise dairy farmers to embrace best practices if they are to get high milk yields from the cows. **Denis Bbosa and Lominda Afedraru** write.

It is frustrating for any farmer to invest money and time in his cow and get meagre returns during milking period.

The distressing malaise formed the basis of the Monitor Farm Clinic last Saturday at Makerere University Agricultural Research Institute, Kabanyolo (MUARIK) as dairy experts; Dr Constantine Katongole and Precious Taremwa took the participants through various remedies.

Between his lectures, Dr Katongole offered breaks for farmers to visit the calf barn to get the practical version of what he was teaching about.

Below are some of the key factors that contribute to low milk production according to Katongole, a senior lecturer at the Makerere University department of agricultural production.

Parity

Milk production is determined by the number of calves the cow has produced (parity). The more the number of calves, the higher the milk levels. The mammary gland develops every after calf production but experts advise that the number of calves should be limited to five. Age and lactation are the other crucial factors that determine the amount of milk a farmer expects from his cow.

Feeding

According to experts, the cow's milk production ability may be affected by change in feeding patterns. If the dairy cows are fed poorly expect low milk yields and vice versa. "It is better for a farmer to read through the cow records before buying it," Taremwa said.

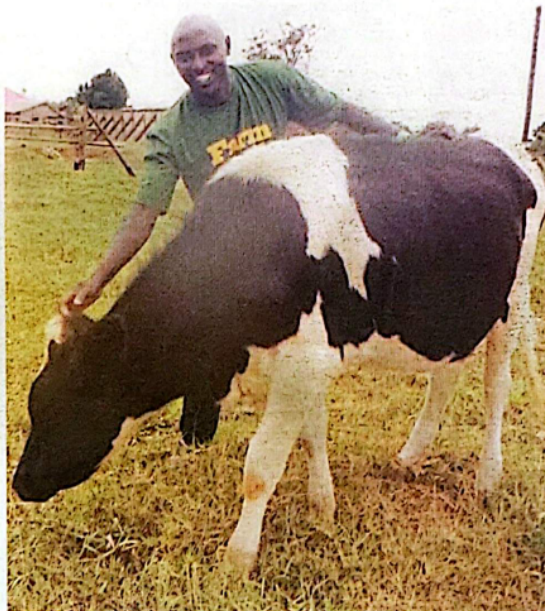
Breed of cow

There are many dairy breeds such as Jersey, Ayrshire, Friesian, Guernsey and Brown Swiss than today's farmers crave for. According to Precious Taremwa, the coordinator of the dairy department at Kabanyolo, breeds such as Friesian and Ayrshire eat a lot and give more milk while the likes of Jersey, long horned and Guernsey eat less and give less milk. "Although Friesian and Ayrshire give more milk, the quality of milk is not so good. They produce less concentrated milk (3.5 butter particles) while the Jersey, long horned and Guernsey have high quality milk (4.95 butter particles)," he explains. He advises farmers to consider adaptability of the cow to the environment especially those that can withstand drought periods. "Look for animals that will ably resist diseases so that by the time you call the doctor it is still alive. You should consider the semen source for the exotic breeds," he said. Taremwa, advised farmers to do a mix between the cows that give a lot of milk and those that give quality milk for better produce.



Enthusiastic farmers checking out an artistic impression of a modern dairy paddock system at the stall of Heifer International on Saturday. PHOTOS BY LOMINDA AFEDRARU

How to get more milk out of your cow



Precious Taremwa, coordinator dairy development at Kabanyolo, showcases a mature Friesian during the Monitor Farm Clinic on Saturday. Below (right) a farmer is checking on a calf.

Comfort and welfare

The environment in which a cow lives also contributes greatly to its milk productivity according to Katongole. "If a cow is in zero grazing, it needs ample space to stretch and exercise," he says. Cows need to maintain feeding intervals, frequency in milking (the more you milk the more milk you get), avoid

physical confrontation like beating it during milking and not mixing cows of different types according to experts.

Managing three stages of lactation

There is always a challenge for most farmers when handling the dry off period (the time when you are not

IMPORTANT TO NOTE

It is also advisable that a cow gives birth to one calf after 18 months for high milk yields, successful insemination exercise and better animal health. "The cow gives you milk for 300 days. Expect more milk in the first 100 days and a decrease thereafter," Katongole added.

There is a natural tendency in milking cows that farmers were advised to grasp clearly; a cow reduces milk after 14 days of birth because it has lost appetite and is stressed. Instead of starving it, the experts advised continued good feeding because body weight will return soon between week 10 and 12.

milking the cow up to the time when it gets a calf). Experts recommend 60 days but the hunger for money drives most farmers to abuse it. It is also advisable that a cow gives birth

