

81-year old Henry Kanyike has practised dairy farming for the last 46 years, and he is still counting. He advises youth to venture into farming, writes Denis Bbosa.

81-year-old Kanyike makes the most of mixed farming

Dairy farming is indeed embedded in 81-year old Henry Kanyike's DNA.

As you are ushered into his compound at Kiteezi, a Kampala suburb, your first sight is a dilapidated tractor and the sounds of mooing cows.

He has been in the dairy farming business since 1972 when he cut his teeth with one local breed. He has gone on to introduce a 'Milk Bar' in Uganda that is just a stone throw from his 30-acre farm in Kiteezi-Lusanja.

He has weathered storms and regimes and persisted to become a popular milk supplier in Kampala, with 20 exotic milk producing cows.

The most memorable moment in his life is from 1982, when government soldiers invaded his and his friends' herd in Kasaala, Mukono and ate them all.

"I had taken my cows from here to hide them in Kasaala. To my dismay, government soldiers under Brig. Oyite Ojok came and ate more than 200 cattle we owned with my colleagues; Andrew Lubega, GM Kityo (RIP) and Mpalampa Musisi," he says.

They took on the government through courts of law and got their compensation a few years later.

"We had evidence and we were known all over as prominent farmers. Although we got a refund, it wasn't worth our cows and we spent it right away without doing anything profitable," Kanyike adds.

Kanyike's redemption came in 1988. The early government of President Museveni introduced a barter trade policy that saw Ugandans give Germany coffee in exchange for high breed cows.

"We would go to designated points such as Njeru to get these German breed cows which in most cases were just months, from producing. Although most of us got instant milk yields, most farmers without knowledge to maintain them suffered great losses," he says.

To bolster his farm, Kanyike got a loan from the defunct Uganda Commercial Bank (UCB). He used the money to buy machinery, a pickup truck and other necessities that took his farm to another level.

Trained to be a farmer

After his formal education at Namityango College, St Peter's College, Tororo and St Peter's Nsambya, Kanyike enrolled for a diploma course in Soil Science at Namulonge agricultural institute.

In 1961, he applied for a scholarship in England from where he attained another Diploma in Soil Science.

He worked, toured and continued



Kanyike with one of his farmer handlers Jackson Ssekandi



Kanyike attends to his piggy farm. PHOTOS BY DENIS BBOSA

HIS ADVICE TO TODAY'S FARMER

He advises any prospective urban farmer with five acres of land to start with using one acre for labourers' accommodation, go for mixed farming and be kind to neighbours to avoid frustration.

"I trust my workers and care more about the records for analysis. In case of an abnormality in the records, I do an investigation and tell them my loss is their loss. I pay them on time and that is how I have been successful in this venture."

He cannot underestimate his continued interaction with various institutes like Makerere University, Kabanyolo, Namulonge, Kawanda and Nakyesasa with who they have exchange programs.

He lectures at their seminars and allows them train their students at his farm which provides him a 'win-win' situation.

In five years years to come, the 81-year old wants his farm to remain intact and making more profits. An ardent reader of Seeds of Gold Magazine, Kanyike is grateful for the Monitor Farm Clinics that have polished his farming experience as he gets to interact with other seasoned farmers countrywide.

to gain experience in many European countries such as Holland, Germany and Belgium.

"I came back and went to Namulonge, I had a stint with Unesco before heading to Kyambogo Institute (now Kyambogo University) where I taught for nine years before calling it quits," says Kanyike, whose memory is still

impressive even in his advanced age.

He took the writer on a tour of his 30-acre farm for close to two hours without rest but only a walking stick to give him balance. The farm has cows, poultry, bananas and grass.

From Kyambogo, he was recruited as an examiner for then East African Community (EAC), working with Prof

Asaph Wandera, Bazilio Kiwanuka, Mathew Bukunya (retired Unep secretary) before retiring in 1974 to concentrate on his budding farm.

"By this time, my wife, who I met at the education ministry, was looking after our farm and children as I travelled the world. We built our house on the farm for close monitoring which has worked in

our favour many years after," Kanyike says.

Earning handsomely in dairy

Dairy farming is his main activity on the farm and over the years he has had a varying number of cows on the farm (20 to 40).

"We keep records for every cow of the year on whether to keep or sell it off to ease the burden. At the moment we get on average 20 litres of milk daily from the 20 cows we have."

The secret code of his success in milk production is simple, says research about the breeds you want to keep, cross breed, make your own feeds and go for advanced technologies to improve on the productivity.

"I have Jersey, Friesians, Brown Swiss, and Guernsey which are crossbred according to expert guidance. I have embraced artificial insemination technology from South Korea which is doing wonders," Kanyike reveals.

He advises the use of sexed semen which eliminates the bull – albeit being expensive.

Mixed farming a huge boost

After visiting South Korea five years ago, Kanyike embraced mixed farming because there is an available market for the products and interdependency of farm enterprises.

He has a piggery unit that operates under the IMO (indigenous micro-organism) technology, acres of bananas that get manure from the animals and has ready market in Kiteezi.

He grows cow grass like lab-lab which reduces the money that would have been spent on silver fish and cotton.

The products from his mixed farm are used at his milk farm to make ice cream, burgers, chapattis, yogurt and other food stuffs. A 600-litre cooler also waits to distribute to customers from Kampala and beyond.

He has over the time lured his five children into farming. One of his daughters handles the poultry section at home while the other manages the milk bar.

Challenges

"Vaccines and other pesticides remain expensive as is the modern artificial insemination. Back in the day, we used to have farmers' park that would give us free tractor fuel," he says.

He alludes to the high labour turnover as the other biting issue. Training a trustworthy and experienced farm manager is also another hurdle. Kanyike calls on government to lower the high power tariff and give a few incentives to local investors like him who create employment opportunities.

"Farming in urban areas is becoming difficult yet in cities that I have visited like Tel Aviv (Israel) it is the trend. Land encroachment is rampant and I am currently in court over land issues," revealed a crestfallen Kanyike, who once chaired the Dairy Development Authority (DDA) and is a former board member of Uganda Manufacturers Association (UMA).

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LITRES OF MILK KANYIKE GETS DAILY FROM HIS DAIRY HERD ON AVERAGE