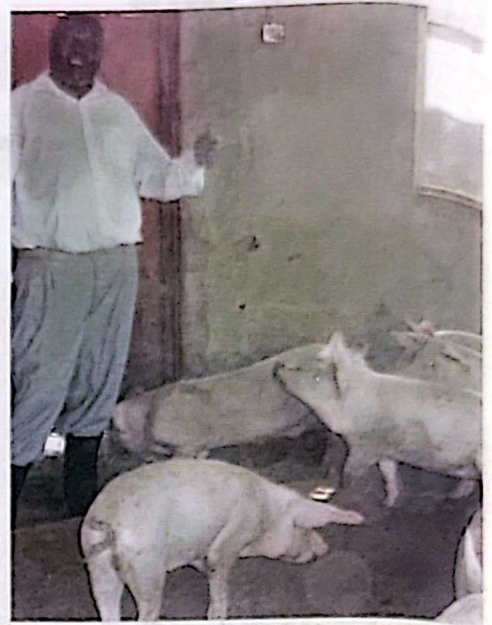


Mixed farming is Ekobu's retirement plan



Dr Ekobu cuts alfalfa from his garden. He opted to grow his animal feeds on the farm. PHOTOS BY SIMON PETER EMWAMU



The retired doctor explains how he manages to keep his pigsty clean.

Peter Antingi Ekobu does a variety of projects on his piece of land, writes
SIMON PETER EMWAMU

Very many retirees have become a laughing stock in villages with several living miserable lives. However, the story of Peter Antingi Ekobu, a retired veterinary doctor proves that the elderly too can compete with the young to mine the much treasured gold on a farmland. Ekobu, who lives about five kilometres off Soroti Town, in Owili village, Kamuda Sub County, retired two decades ago and found a new life in farming.

Hatching farm idea

Ekobu reveals he retreated to his home for meditation, days after bidding farewell to his colleagues in public service.

And while armed with Shs1m, Ekobu says he decided to invest the savings into mixed farming on a huge chunk of land he inherited from his parents.

"I opted to venture into rearing cows and keeping birds under free-range system," says Ekobu.

The farm

Something that strikes you about his farm is the range of activities including, orange growing, tree growing, piggery, goat rearing, maize growing and water harvesting.

After about three years of keeping local cows and hens, Ekobu says in early 2000, he mobilised more funds to fulfill his farming dreams.

He used the capital to acquire improved goats, sheep, exotic cows, piggery and maize growing.

In piggery alone, Ekobu says he spent a cool Shs25m and today he

VALUABLE LESSONS

True, once beaten twice shy, indeed Ekobu says he has now invested heavily into animal feed production like planting alfalfa.

"We have planted lots of animal feeds including alfalfa. The prospects are brighter and very soon milk production will more than double," said Ekobu.

"The alfalfa is rich in energy, protein, fiber and minerals which enable the cows to produce enough quantities of milk," he added.

On his dairy farm that has four exotic cows, 10 cross breeds, Ekobu is strict on ensuring feeding measures which enable him obtain good quantities of milk.

ADVICE

Commitment in farming is a key element in ensuring that the projects undertaken see the light of the day. "Yes you can employ hundreds of workers in a farm but without your close supervision, the projects either fail or you make hefty losses."

"My advice to retired civil servants, there is life outside public office and the most blessed money that I know is earned from the soil through farming," he states.

owns over 200 pigs of the camboro and the white large breeds.

Profits

With his mixed farm set, Ekobu reveals save for the last season which was extensively affected by

50

THE NUMBER OF LITRES OF MILK THAT EKOBU SELLS IN ONE DAY

the prolonged drought, he has been earning millions from the sales of milk, pigs, sheep, local hens and goats.

For example, on a good day, he gets 50 litres of milk which he sells on the local market at Shs2,500.

"Each mature pig earns me Shs300, 000 while the piglets go for Shs150, 000 each and at the end of each year I am able to realise Shs10m in profits from pigs alone," he says.

Bigger picture

The vegetation around his farm makes it a cool place for his dairy farming and piggery projects to flourish.

Ekobu enthusiastically talks about his enterprises. On his farm, the elderly Ekobu has also developed simple water harvesting tanks to ease access of drinking water for his livestock.

Besides, the plastic water tanks that grace the edges of his three house blocks are supplementary tanks made of bricks and cement fixed besides the edges of the pasture and animal shades.

"This has helped me cut cost of water bills," Ekobu narrates. "After every four hours of grazing on pasture or



The farmer feeds his cows with fresh alfalfa.

fodder, a farmer should pour water on his herd to cool their bodies and thus help quicken digestion, which multiplies the rate at which a cow under milking stages will produce milk," he tips.

Challenges

According to Ekobu, all is not a smooth path saying the biggest challenge he faces today is procuring the feeds for piggery and silage for the cattle.

"The prolonged drought hit most of us unawares. We had not stored silage and hay for the animals. The little which was on the market was very expensive to come by. Because the animals were feeding less, the quality and quantity of milk was greatly affected and we counted millions in losses," he says solemnly.

He adds that unlike the cows, the goats, sheep are not heavy feeders, the only issue here is having monthly de-worming which comes

with a huge cost. According to Ekobu, goats that are well -looked after, through routine monthly de-worming, spraying against ticks and vaccination, to produce twice a year each.

Forget the deworming; Ekobu is faced with a huge challenge of dealing with the killer swine disease.

"Once the swine fever attacks, it will definitely wipe out an entire herd and one will have to start afresh. As prevention, we ensure the pigs do not feed on animal meat. We also maintain an inflow of fresh water as pigs are susceptible to extreme temperatures," he notes.

"The other big challenge I face daily on this mixed farm is related to labour.

All departments call for your attention such that by the time of retiring to bed, you are often so exhausted. One who is not keen at drawing budget records for each department, may fail to accept the