

Vision Group, in partnership with dfcu Bank, the Netherlands Embassy in Uganda and KLM Airlines, is searching for Uganda's best farmers. Every Tuesday, we shall profile nominated farmers until November when a panel of judges shall select the best. Sh150m and a trip to the Netherlands await the best farmers to be announced next month.

By Rogers Sunday

Steve Williams, a resident of Kyamukama village, Busoro sub-county in Kabale district has had to drop many thoughts on how he can sustainably fund his charity organisation before choosing to venture into dairy goat rearing.

In November last year, Williams started his dairy goat rearing project with six goats, which were locally sourced. Today, Williams has 109 goats, 37 of which are kids. "I first bought six dairy goats from Kasese district and four months later, I got 40 more goats from the same area," Williams said. He bought each dairy goat at sh350,000.

Williams, a graduate of furniture design from Bournemouth University in England, explains that he got his first capital of sh2.1m from the savings that he made from Kyamukama Lodge, which he opened in 2003, after choosing to settle in Kabale. The lodge accommodates tourists visiting the several attractions in the Rwenzori region.

After realising that the breed sourced from Kasese was not meeting his expectations of producing good quality milk within a space of four months, Williams opted to import 27 in-kid goats from South Africa. "Importing these goats all the way from South Africa was expensive. I had to dig deep into my savings but also took a bank loan," he said.

Buying and importation of in-kid goats from South Africa cost him a total of sh85m of which sh52m was a bank loan. Luckily enough, Williams says that most of the goats delivered three months after arriving at the farm. Today, Williams is using the profits got from the farm to repay the loan.

He says his family and friends initially did not see the business sense of goat rearing, but he says he was determined to drive his dream forward.

"My family thinks I enjoy doing crazy things. So, they thought that dairy goat rearing was one of those things," he says.

Farm management

Williams employs 12 permanent staff on the farm.

Their major roles are to milk, feed and ensure the wellbeing of the goats. A few of his employees work in the cheese processing plant, which is also located at the farm.

Being the director of both the farm and the lodge, Williams manages both projects concurrently.

"My major role is to manage and market the farm and its products both locally and internationally. I arrive at the farm at 8:00am, go around to monitor the milking and later get back to office to respond to emails as well as keeping the farm's social media account active," he says.

Currently, Williams is the only member of his family who is directly involved in the running and operations of the farm.

His parents and siblings live in England, while his wife is still studying. His three children are all below 10 years.



WILLIAMS IS MILKING CHEESE FROM GOATS



Williams at the goat houses.
Photos by Rogers Sunday

"As we grow as a farm, I intend to recruit more staff especially those that will be milking the goats because I want to keep it (milking) by hand," he says.

Innovations

Williams has 109 goats under a zero grazing system. This he says helps control worms, ticks and any other pests that may attack the goats while they feed in an open space. The goats are housed in raised houses, complete with feeding sections.

"When we had just started, the veterinary officer used to come at least twice a week, but now he comes only once in two weeks. This has helped us cut out on maintaining the goats," he says.

There is also a milking parlour, feeding area and a courtyard, where the goats go for physical exercises. Williams bought a donkey, which he uses to transport all the goat feeds from the field.

"Instead of using fuel in a tractor to collect feeds for the goats, I rely on a donkey, which is not expensive and it also does a lot of work," he says.

He says in order to produce good quality milk, the goats are fed on sweet potato vines, which he purchases from farmers in the community.

Value addition

Williams started with the production of cheese from the goat milk. This was after he realised that the imported South African goats have good quality milk. The farm produces at least 250kg of cheese per month.

The cheese is processed from 70 litres of milk that he gets on a daily basis.

"When I had just opened the farm, I first bought small handmade equipment to make cheese. It was not of good quality, but good enough for the starting point," Williams says.

He explains that for the start, the produced cheese was given freely to the locals as he tested the market.

He soon set up a cheese processing plant. After he started a campaign for charity to open up Kyamukama Child Development Centre, Williams got funding to ship in a better and improved cheese processing plant at a cost of sh100m.

The goats have a milking parlour, feeding area and a courtyard, for physical exercise



Williams says he plans to start packaging for sale in the near future after doubling milk production on the farm. As for other goat byproducts, such as dung, it is collected and used as farm manure.

Farm financing and expenditure
Williams says within a space of at least a year, the farm will be making a profit of sh14m-sh17m per month. This, he says will mainly be put to charity.

"All the money that we are making now is being re-invested into the farm and paying back the bank loan because we are still expanding. Buying more equipment, but I am so hopeful because the future is bright," he says. Williams sells a kilogramme of cheese at sh100,000.

Market

Williams says he has been the sole marketer of his products. Ninety-five percent of his produce goes to hotels in Kampala, which is about 300km from the farm.

"Our biggest market is in hotels that are located in central Uganda. We pack and send our products by bus and they are delivered three times a week. As a supplier, I

meet all the transportation costs," Williams says. In Fort Portal, where the product is produced, Williams says only 20kg of cheese are consumed per week.

"To get the market for my farm products I would call the hotel management or walk in physically to ask whether they are interested in buying," he said. According to Williams, he is trying to explore the market in the neighbouring East African countries, such as Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania and South Sudan.

Social impact

Williams started the dairy goat project solely to fundraise for charity. Today, Williams has put up the Kyamukama Child Development Centre in Fort Portal town.

He says the idea of the centre was nurtured by his first son. He is now six years and developed epilepsy.

"As I struggled to help my son, many other parents in the district were having similar challenge," Williams says. He says he first hired a therapist to take care of his son as he developed the idea of the Child Development Centre.

"I realised I cannot help only my son in the entire community, where I am staying. I, therefore, chose to start the centre in 2014," he says.

Today the centre offers specialised treatment, education and support to children with disabilities.

"We work to ensure that children achieve their optimum potential by minimising the effect of their disability so that they can overcome the barriers that they and their families face," he says.

Williams explains that the centre has helped reduce the stigma among parents of children affected by disorders.

According to Williams, there was no better way of keeping the centre operational other than through the sale of cheese.

Three things to learn from Williams

1 Saving: Williams was able to start the goat business with savings from his first business.

2 Multi-task: Starting a new business does not mean forgetting about the old one. Williams manages the farm and the lodge at the same time.

3 Diversify: Williams is not only looking for market from within Uganda. He is looking beyond the borders.

HARVESTING Cheese production



Williams produces cheese from goat milk. Today, the farm produces at least 250kg of cheese per month

WHAT OTHERS SAY

Lillian Nakibuka:

I work at the farm, specifically the cheese department. The little time I have gained expertise in the processing of cheese.

Joshua Kasajja:

I had never seen goats being reared from indoors. It was my first time here at Kyamukama. My duty on the farm is to collect goat feeds. I have learnt that not all types of grass are good for livestock, especially dairy animals. I mainly look out for organic plants.

Joseph Mwebaze:

I am lucky to have been among the few people who were employed here as the farm started. I have seen it grow. I have learnt a lot about goat rearing.

Richard Muhumusa:

I am not a veterinary doctor, but the time I have spent on the farm I have gained hands-on skills on the treatment and wellbeing of goats. I can now handle simple animal diseases.

Challenges

Steve Williams says one of his biggest challenges is been the negative perception the public has on Ugandan-made products.

"When you tell people that the product is Ugandan, they think that it is of poor quality. They only prove themselves wrong after tasting it," he says.

According to Williams, the goat dairy on the Ugandan market are not of poor quality. He says it has not been easy for him to get people who can milk the goats as most of the locals regard it as socially unacceptable.

Advice to farmers

Williams says the success of a dairy farm lies in the hands of its director who has the passion for it and understands its vision.

"As a director you must physically be on the farm daily. Do not be afraid to get your hands dirty," he said. He also advised farmers to seek experts and to learn from other people's mistakes.

"Any successful farmer should not be proud or embarrassed to fail," he stated.



Williams opted for a donkey because it is cost effective

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