

FAO-China high-yield goats present hope in livestock production push



With better feeding and improved breeds, farmers can produce more and access better markets. PHOTO/ TREVOR LUTALO

FAO and its partners are working with government agencies to integrate lessons from the programme into national agricultural systems, while plans are underway to strengthen expertise in animal breeding and feed innovation.

BY TREVOR LUTALO

Uganda's livestock sector is showing early signs of transformation following the introduction of a high-yield goat breed from China under a joint programme with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), raising hopes for increased meat production and improved farmer incomes.

The development, though still in its early stages, is being closely watched by policymakers and researchers as a potential breakthrough in the country's push to modernise livestock production.

At the centre of this effort are just nine Jianzhou Big Eared goats imported in July last year under the FAO-China South-South Cooperation (SSC) Project. Despite their small number, the animals are being positioned as a foundation for wider genetic improvement and

productivity gains in Uganda's goat industry.

Six of the goats are currently housed at the National Agricultural Research Organisation's Mbarara Zonal Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MbaZardi), where scientists are monitoring their growth, adaptability, and breeding potential under local conditions.

The initiative is part of Phase III of the FAO-China SSC Project, one of the longest-running agricultural cooperation programmes between Uganda, China, and the United Nations agency.

Speaking during a field visit in Mbarara, FAO Senior Programme Specialist Debel Gutta said the project continues to deliver tangible results across multiple agricultural

sectors.

"This project demonstrates how international cooperation can deliver real results," Mr Gutta said, noting that the final phase is focused on scaling up successful interventions and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Since its launch in 2012, the programme has facilitated the deployment of 47 Chinese experts to Uganda during its first two phases, supporting technology transfer, establishing demonstration farms, and strengthening local capacity in crop production, aquaculture, and livestock.

**200
DAILY WEIGHT
GAINS IN**

Potential Impact

At MbaZardi, early results from the introduced goats are encouraging, reinforcing optimism about their potential impact.

Dr Andrew Wange Bugenyi, a senior research officer at the institute, said the initial batch of six goats, four females and two males arrived at the institute in October last year and have since produced seven kids, bringing the total herd to about 20 animals across the country.

While projections had placed expected daily weight gains at up to

200 grams, the goats are currently averaging about 145 grams under local feeding conditions, still significantly higher than most indigenous breeds.

"We are seeing encouraging growth performance even with local feeds," Dr Bugenyi said. "Kids born in late January are already weighing about 17 kilograms in just two and a half months, which is quite impressive."

Adaptability

Researchers are now focused on assessing the animals' adaptability to Uganda's environment, including their response to local feeds, disease resistance, and tolerance to climatic conditions. So far, the goats have shown resilience, with only minor health challenges such as manageable worm infestations.

They have also adapted well to locally available forage, including calliandra and fig leaves, reducing dependence on costly commercial feeds, an important factor for smallholder farmers.

Beyond immediate performance, experts say the real promise of the Jianzhou Big Eared goats lies in their potential to improve Uganda's indigenous breeds through cross-breeding.

Dr Jacob Mukose, the national livestock counterpart for the project, said local breeds such as the Mubende and East African goats are typically smaller and slower-growing, limiting their commercial viability.

By introducing the faster-maturing Chinese breed into local gene pools, researchers aim to develop hybrids capable of gaining more than 100 grams per day more than double the growth rate of some indigenous goats.

"This is about increasing production in the shortest time possible," Dr Mukose said. "If farmers can raise animals that grow faster and reach market weight sooner, it directly translates into better incomes."

The government is also viewing the initiative as part of a broader strategy to expand Uganda's footprint in regional and international meat markets, particularly in the Middle East, where demand for goat meat remains strong.

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