HOW ONE COW CAN TRANSFORM A HOUSEHOLD – KASIRYE BREEDERS

By Herbert Musoke

Kasirye Breeders — Mityana's stall was among the most visited during the three-days Harvest Money Expo at Kololo as farmers and those interested in venturing into livestock farming asked questions and admired the items displayed.

Hood Kasirye Kiwana, the director of the farm, says they exhibited improved animals thanks to URUS that supplies them with semen of high performing breeds.

"For a long time, dairy farmers have been having a challenge of breed. We want to show farmers that you can actually have one cow and get 50 litres of milk a day than having four and you get only 20 litres as each produces only five litres," he says.



High yields are not only about cattle genetics, but also feeding quality and quantity, physical health, comfortability, records and timing



PHOTOS BY HERBERT MUSOKE



Milk products on display at the expo. Record keeping and timing are key strategies in ensuring higher yields

RECORD KEEPING

Dr William Kabanda, the central region manager at URUS, says one thing failing Ugandan farmers is record keeping as they don't even know if their cows are pregnant or not. "For this, we have come up with an App called the *Dairy comp GO*, where a farmer can record everything about their cows and it will send reminders on inseminations, vaccination, giving birth, among other[updates], to help keep track of your farm," he says.

ATTAINING GOOD CATTLE BREEDS

While facilitating a Breed Selection and Improvement session at the expo, Dr William Kabanda, the central region manager at URUS, correlated the lack of good genetics in cattle with production quality.

He says there is a need to increase Artificial Insemination (AI) adoption by small scale farmers, build a sustainable, reliable and dependable network of AI technicians, increase participation of women in dairy value chain and build partnership with local genetic centres, processors and other stake holders.

URUS, in partnership with the National Genetics Resources Research Centre and Data bank (NAGRIC & DB), is having a Memorandum Of Understanding to improve AI and other livestock genetics related activities in the country for better production yields.

TIPS FROM THE TRAINING

On breed improvement, Dr Kizito Mugimba Kahoza says if one runs a farm for five and more years with the same production, it simply means one is not improving the genetics and the farm is stunted. He advises farmers to always look for high productive breeds which will improve the productivity and profitability of their farms.

For dairy cows, for example, Mugimba highlights a number of breeds for farmers to choose from based on their traits and performance abilities:

Girolando; this breed has the world's highest milk production record, producing 127.57 litres a day and around 3,600 litres for 305-day lactation. It can yield 20,000 litres of milk throughout her lifetime and its milk is known for having about 4% fat content.

Milking Gyr; preferred for its high fertility, efficiency in feed conversion, adaptability to heat stress and can graze in high terrain areas. Others include Ayrshire, Brown swiss, and Guernsey Fleckvieh/Simmental a duo purpose breed.

For beef breeds, Dr Kizito tasks farmers to consider average daily weight gain, which is how much weight a given breed can add per day. Some can gain as much as 2kgs, others as low as 250gms.

Among the beef breeds is Brahaman, Brangus which can weigh up to 200kgs in only six month. Nelore has the record of the highest auction price as a bull, bought at $1m. This is the breed that makes Brazil the world's top beef producer.

Wagyu has the most expensive meat as a kilogramme goes for sh1m.

"As URUS, we have semen of all these bulls to help farmers in Uganda improve their breeds and productivity on their farms," Mugimba says.

INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY

Dr Hamid Rutaro, the technical manager of URUS, says increase in livestock's production is not only about genetics, but a combination of other factors in feeding quality and quantity, health, comfortability, records and timing.

"Although you have the best genetics, without enough quality feed and water, your animals will not produce milk because it is their bodies that produce milk and without feeds, they will be eating their bodies to produce milk. Hence you will end up losing the milk and the cow itself," he says.

"Additionally, poor care and feeding causes abortions and failure to conceive, which deprives you of average milk production," he cautions.

Dr Rutaro further says with better management, each of your cows should give you a calf every year. This is because a cow should be given two months of voluntary waiting period to help her regain body shape, for the uterus to get back to its proper position in preparation to conceive again.

"If you are thinking of having heavy milkers that can give you 30 litres and above, they should drink over 200 litres of water in intervals (10-15 times a day). This means you must avail water all the time for it to drink. Also provide comfortable shelter for the cow to relax as it needs 14-15 hours of relaxation each day for the body to make milk," says Dr Rutaro

TESTING PREGNANCY

Dr Kabanda explained a technology called Bioeasy Bovene pregnancy rapid testing kit that farmers can use to test their animal's pregnancies. It requires a cow's blood sample, from which pregnancy proteins can be detected and results obtained within 20 minutes.

He cautions against a vet inserting their hand in the cow's womb to confirm a pregnancy as this can cause miscarriages before three months.

This technology can also be used in buying calf heifers to avoid being cheated by the seller, and also to determine if the pregnancy is still alive as the proteins will reduce in 8-10 days of pregnancy loss.

DAIRY BUSINESS

For each day a cow is on your farm but doesn't produce milk, it costs you $2-5 (sh7, 200 to 18,000) in wages, water, feed and shelter. In a month, you will have lost between sh216,000 and sh540,000.

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