

Dairy firm tips rural farmers in sustaining milk production

Players in the milk industry are starting to equip farmers with drought-resistant practices aimed at sustained production during absence of rains, **William Lubuulwa** writes.



State minister for Agriculture in charge of Animal Husbandry Joy Kabatsi, accompanied by Fresh Dairy director of milk procurement John Gethi and other officials, is shown a raw milk quality testing procedure during a farmers' field day event held last week at Kazo, Kiruhura District.

COURTESY PHOTO

Although data from the Dairy Development Authority shows that milk production in the country shot to 2.2 billion litres in 2016, up from 1.5 billion litres in 2010, the records are likely to reverse if farmers do not adjust to changes in climate patterns.

Speaking at a farmers' field day event held at Kazo, Kiruhura District last week, Mr John Gethi, Fresh Dairy's director of milk procurement, called for the adoption of animal feed conservation as a way of mitigating the effects of drought on milk production.

"One of the effects of the drought that hit the dairy sector was the lack of pasture and the drying up of water sources. As a result, many farmers lost a number of animals, while production of milk from those that survived dropped marginally," he said.

Mr Gethi said it was important for farmers to adjust to changes in climate patterns, including practicing climate smart activities such as conserving animal feeds and storing water for future use.

"We are also asking farmers to

grow pasture grasses, besides harvesting and storing rain water," he said; adding that conservation of quality hay would ensure adequate supply of animal feed in drought for improved production.

The field day was attended by various stakeholders in the dairy value chain, ranging from input suppliers to dairy service providers, who took farmers through demonstrations on best practice in the dairy enterprise.

Mr Gethi said Fresh Dairy's raw milk intake had risen to more than 350,000 litres per day, up from 80,000 two years ago.

Last year, the processor undertook an equipment upgrade at its Kampala factory that shot its installed capacity to more than 500,000 litres of milk per day.

"The stringent milk quality testing regime we put from the farm gates to the processing floor has begun bearing fruit," Mr Gethi said.

The minister of State for Agriculture in charge of Animal Husbandry, Joy Kabatsi assured farmers that government has set aside some money this financial year for irrigation equipment to enable them grow fodder and pasture grasses.

She said this will help farmers produce animal feeds for future use.

Ms Kabatsi called on farmers to increase milk production through adoption of better animal husbandry practices.