

A Dairy Farmer's Journey to Prosperity

DAIRY FARMER IN SRI LANKA ACQUIRES THE TOOLS NEEDED TO PROGRESS FROM SUBSISTENCE FARMING TO MANAGING HIS DAIRY FARM AS A BUSINESS

Mr. Mahinda Piyatissa, a dairy farmer from Medirigiriya, was struggling to manage his dairy farm and was on the verge of giving up. Since 2000, he had attended many trainings, but the differing practices shared during those trainings often left him more confused. When he was invited for yet another training, he was reluctant to attend, assuming it would be a waste of his time and the additional options would confuse him further. However, Mr. Piyatissa's wife encouraged him to attend the program and then to select and adopt the best approach.

In May 2019, Mr. Piyatissa attended the 'Dairy Entrepreneur Development Program' offered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) funded Market-Oriented Dairy (MOD) Project. His first impression was that the approach to this training was different than others he had attended. Every recommendation was accompanied with a practical demonstration of how it should be done and most importantly why it should be done. This rational approach, which emphasized cow comfort and the message that happy cows would produce more milk, appealed to him. Following the MOD training and continued mentorship from Mr. Muthulingam Umakanth, MOD's Technical Specialist, Mr. Piyatissa decided to begin to implement a few of the best practices he learned and to monitor the results.



Left: The Piyatissa family in front of their newly built cattle shed in October 2019

Right: In January 2020, Mr. Piyatissa is seen showing the partial construction of the new house to the left of the cattle shed, which he is building with the money earned from his dairy farm

Excited by having some implementable ideas that the MOD Technical Specialist assured would provide some quick wins, he started feeding the cows at night, making sure clean water was accessible throughout the day and stopped mixing the cattle concentrate feed in water. Within a week his efforts yielded results, with milk yields increasing by one to two liters per cow per day.

Encouraged by these improvements and the potential for more, Mr. Piyatissa realized that to truly ensure the animals' comfort he needed to house the animals in a safe and comfortable environment rather than allowing them to roam the fields during the day, a practice that put the animals at risk and attracted the neighbors' ire. He decided to take a calculated risk and invest the money he had been saving to build a home for his family towards building a loose-barn style cattle shed. As recommended by MOD, this type of cattle shed allows freedom of movement for the cows, allows them to eat and drink when they like, and keeps them from physical harm.

By making these improvements, Mr. Piyatissa increased his daily milk production from 25 liters from eight cows to 45 liters from six cows. By implementing recommended best practices, he was getting more milk from less cows, just as the MOD team had promised. His milk quality parameters also improved, with solids-not-fat (SNF) increasing from 8.4 to 8.8 percent and fat content from 3.5 to 5.3 percent. He has also been able to successfully impregnate his cows on the first attempt of artificial insemination. After he adopted training best practices during the transition period of the pregnant cows, their milk production increased from four liters to thirteen liters per day.

For Mr. Piyatissa, the calculated risk of putting his savings into building the cattle shed paid off. A few short months after building the shed and increasing his income, he has nearly completed building his house. Speaking of his achievements, Mr. Piyatissa said "understanding the correct way to manage my dairy farm has made all the difference. Following the dairy management training, I also attended MOD's business basics and business planning training which helped me manage my income and expenses better." He added, "I was even able to apply the management knowledge I gained to improve my paddy cultivation and the proper management of both my dairy farm and the paddy cultivation has freed up more time that I can spend with my family."

Looking towards the future, as advised by MOD's Regional Project Coordinator, Mr. Nallathamby Thushyanthan, Mr. Piyatissa has cultivated sorghum in two acres of land to ensure year-round feed availability as he prepares an action plan to increase his daily milk yield to 100 liters. Mr. Thushyanthan said, "the example Mr. Piyatissa has set for other dairy farmers is invaluable. He is the first to develop a loose barn cattle shed in the area and he is generous in sharing his knowledge and experience with other dairy farmers." To this Mr. Piyatissa remarked, "I am proud to be a supplier of good quality milk to feed our nation and it is my civic duty to help others to do the same."

Market-Oriented Dairy (MOD) Project, based in Sri Lanka, is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) 'Food for Progress' initiative and implemented by IESC. The project aims to double the milk production of participating dairy farmers and enable them to obtain a higher price premium for fresh milk through interventions primarily designed to enhance their technical knowledge and create an entrepreneurial, business-oriented mindset. The project also supports enterprises along the dairy value chain to meet the demands of the country's dairy sector to catalyze a sustainable growth. The project's sub-partners are Sarvodaya, University of Florida, Global Dairy Platform and SEAF.