

## Super Napier Produces Super Results for Dairy Farmers

### THE 'KING OF NAPIERS' INCREASES NUTRITION INTAKE OF DAIRY COWS AND MILK YIELD

Mr. Ranjith is a goat farmer in Jaffna, a district located in the northern region of Sri Lanka. He wished to access a better-quality grass to feed his animals. The Provincial Director of the Department of Animal Health and Production, Dr. Kajaranjan, introduced Mr. Ranjith to the United States Department of Agriculture funded Market-Oriented Dairy (MOD) project's technical team in the region, who are involved in capacity building of dairy entrepreneurs. Dr. Akilan Thuraisingam, MOD's Regional Technical Specialist, was in the process of facilitating the distribution of 43,000 Super Napier cuttings to 22 MOD trained dairy farmers in the North from a MOD trained cultivator in another district and proposed this new and improved hybrid variety to Mr. Ranjith.

Super Napier, commonly known as Pakchong-1, is a hybrid Napier variety obtained by crossing Napier (Elephant grass) and Pearl Millet. It is a perennial grass that is well adapted to the tropics and provides the highest crude protein content (14-18 percent) amongst Napier varieties in Asia. Producing nearly 200 tons per acre per year with 7-8 harvests per year, it provides ample feed quantity for a herd of 15 cows.



Mr. Ranjith is pictured with his Super Napier crop (left) and preparing cuttings for sale (right).

After seeing the quality of his crop on his two acres of land and witnessing the growing demand for good quality grasses by dairy farmers in the region, Mr. Ranjith decided to sell Super Napier cuttings as an additional source of income. Using MOD's farmer network and dairy processor partners to help identify potential buyers, he has sold over 13,000 cuttings to date.

Mr. Kathirkramanathan Prasanth is a young MOD-trained dairy farmer in Achchuverly in the



**Mr. Prasanth is a tall young man, yet the healthy crop of Super Napier towers over him.**

Jaffna district. He has five milking cows, three heifers, and four calves. Prior to the MOD training he attended, his daily milk production was at 25 to 30 liters per day, and he experienced significant variation in yields throughout the year. Dr. Akilan helped him understand the value of good quality grasses in not only increasing milk yield but in improving milk quality in terms of higher percentage of milk fat and solids-not-fat (SNF). He also learned from Dr. Akilan that using grasses as feed also reduces dependence on expensive feed concentrates. Mr. Prasanth purchased cuttings from Mr. Ranjith and planted a half-an acre of land. As a part-time food crop cultivator, Mr. Prasanth was able to apply those learnings as well to be able to grow a healthy Super Napier crop.

Mr. Prasanth fed his herd the Super Napier grass chopped and mixed as Total Mixed Ration (TMR) as per the instructions given at the MOD training. He has reported that he has experienced at least a one-to-two-liter increase in

milk production per day. Happy with his outcome, Mr. Prasanth said, "My animals seemed to prefer this feed variety and when I feed using the TMR method, the feed intake is high. The high crude protein content means I have to purchase less of the expensive protein supplements." Talking of future plans, Mr. Prasanth added, "With MOD's interventions, I have increased milk production to 40 liters per day and plan to reach 60 liters per day by September 2021 as I work towards a final target of 100 liters per day."

Dr. Akilan, who helped 20 other farmers cultivate Super Napier directly and facilitated 19 other farmers to cultivate the crop indirectly, is happy that the region's dairy farmers have access to good quality grasses. Dr. Akilan recently said, "I am happy that all this could be facilitated and coordinated through the COVID-19 lockdown and I was able to mentor and monitor via the phone when physical meetings were restricted. Most of the farmers are getting about 10-13kg per bush and are able to increase daily yield by about one to two liters on average when fed using the TMR method. Most of the farmers were able to reduce the quantity of concentrate fed thereby increasing the profit margin."

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.