

Sold on Silage!

YOUNG DAIRY ENTREPRENEUR IN THE CENTRAL HILLS OF SRI LANKA FINDS VALUE IN SILAGE

Mr. Richard Kingsley from Lindula in the central hills of Sri Lanka purchased ten imported cows and started a dairy business in 2016. Without a satisfying return from dairying, he sold a few of his animals, found a caretaker for the remaining animals, and started driving a cab to earn a living. When Sri Lanka was hit with the first wave of COVID-19, he decided to return to dairying to fulfill his ambition to be self-employed and an entrepreneur once again. Continuing his earlier practices, he assumed that feeding roadside grass to his animals was enough and was puzzled when he was not getting the milk yield he was expecting. This time around, to his luck, he was invited to attend the Dairy Entrepreneur Development Program offered by the Market-Oriented Dairy (MOD) Project, a program funded by the 'Food for Progress' initiative of the United States Department of Agriculture. There he learned the true value of animal nutrition in increasing milk production and that a consistent, year-round feed supply is an absolute necessity to sustain a lengthy milking period.

Finding sufficient nutritious feed consistently throughout the year is a challenge for Sri Lanka's dairy farmers. Although the island nation is known as the 'emerald isle' for its luscious green forest cover and abundant vegetation, its cultivated land and water resources are dedicated only to the cultivation of crops for human consumption. The absence of sufficient crop production for animal consumption has created a lack of nutritious year-round feed for dairy cows on the island. To address this, one of the key solutions that MOD



Mr. Kingsley is seen here feeding silage to his herd during the night feed, a key best practice promoted by MOD.

promotes to dairy farmers is to store good quality feed as silage. Silage, known as the 'rocket fuel' for cows, is essentially pasture grass that has been 'pickled' or preserved to be fed to cows when good quality grass is unavailable. The preservation process retains much of the

grass' nutrients such as sugars and proteins, making silage a precious commodity for dairy farmers.

After attending the MOD workshop, Mr. Kingsley understood that depending on roadside grass is not a good option for a successful dairy operation. Mr. Vijayakumar Satheeskanth, MOD's Regional Project Officer, advised him on the benefits of good quality silage to increase milk production. Mr. Satheeskanth explained that even though Mr. Kingsley does not own any land to grow fodder and make silage himself, the return on investment on purchasing silage to feed his animals would still be positive. To test Mr. Satheeskanth's claim, Mr. Kingsley purchased one ton of good quality sorghum silage from a producer that MOD had developed and introduced to him. Within days, he experienced increased milk volumes, with each cow producing about three to four liters per day more than they previously had. He shared this experience with his neighbors who are also raising dairy cows and encouraged them to try feeding their herd silage. Trusting Mr. Kingsley's word, they bought some silage from Mr. Kingsley as a trial and experienced at least a two to three liter increase in milk production per cow.

Ever the entrepreneur, Mr. Kingsley saw another opportunity to expand his income as a



retailer of silage for the neighboring community. He purchased five tons of silage for his own use as well as for sale. He retained a small margin from selling the extra silage packs, which provided an additional source of income. He already has four customers, two of whom are MOD trained farmers and are aware of the value of silage but had not had the means to acquire silage until Mr. Kingsley started selling it in their neighborhood. Next, he plans to expand his customer base to ten farmers and to develop a silage selling network.

Above is a stock of silage maintained by Mr. Kingsley for his own use as well as for sale to neighboring farms.

Mr. Kingsley said, "After introducing good quality silage to [their] diet, the milk production increased by three to four liters per animal. Not only that, their body condition is also great which means they will have healthy calves and good milking periods in the future." He added,

“Now I am confident I can achieve my target of 100 liters per day. Mr. Safwan from MOD has helped me draw out an action plan. In addition to my increased income from my dairy business, following the best practices freed up more free time so that I could start the silage sales as an added income.”

Mr. Safwan Ameer, MOD’s Technical Specialist in the region, said, “It is a pleasure to work with young men with an entrepreneurial spirit seeking knowledge and using it wisely to establish a sustainable business. The central hills of Sri Lanka does not have enough land for fodder cultivation due its terrain, so Mr. Kingsley saw the business opportunity, tested the product at his own farm, and is now developing a network of customers for the silage.” With the help of MOD, Mr. Kingsley has identified a network of about ten farmers in the neighborhood to whom he plans to supply silage.

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.