

Changing mindset drives change

SHEDDING DATED PRACTICES AND EMBRACING THE NEW HELPS SRI LANKAN DAIRY FARMER MAKE RAPID GAINS

Thusinthra, a farmer from Vanivelankulam in the northern region of Sri Lanka, started dairy farming only two years ago when he purchased two cows with the financial support of a relative. Today he has nine cows in total with four milking cows yielding a total of 18-20 liters of milk per day. Having faced many difficulties in making a livelihood in the past, Thusinthra's goal was to develop a model farm to generate a sustainable income for himself and provide employment opportunities for others. He also has a vision to increase milk production to 500 liters a day and establish a small milk processing operation to serve the local area.



New lease on life: following the MOD training, two calves that were suffering from severe malnutrition were nursed back to help with proper feeding practices.

Determined to meet his goals, Thusinthra welcomed the opportunity to host one of the Market-Oriented Dairy (MOD) Project's 'Dairy Entrepreneur Development Program' training sessions at his farm. After close interactions with MOD's field teams, led by the Regional Coordinator Thiyagarajah Benziger and Regional Technical Specialist Dr. Akilan Thuraisingham, Thusinthra understood that to achieve his vision he would need to be committed to a whole mindset change. As a relative newcomer to dairy farming, he realized that discarding dated practices and learning anew was critical.

Following the MOD training and appreciating the value of year-round feed availability, Thusinthra cultivated nearly three acres of land with Sugar Graze, CO3, and Maize. In addition, under MOD guidance, he installed a sprinkler irrigation system to water the cultivation and constructed a pond to grow Azolla fern, a sustainable feed for livestock with a high protein, vitamin, and mineral content. He also purchased a grass chopper so that he could cut the fodder to the ideal size and mix the green matter and the concentrate feed together before feeding, which increases the intake by the cows.

Intent on increasing the total milk yield to 100 liters per day by the end of the year, Thusinthra is applying the best practices in cow and calf management as taught by MOD. Thusinthra started seeing immediate improvements as a result of these changes with increases in milk volumes by 2-3 liters per cow. "I am thrilled with the kind of results I am getting in such a short time. After implementing what the MOD team has taught me, I get 9-10 more liters of milk a day". With the new calf rearing methods he has adopted and applying

better feeding practices Thusinthra was also able to save the lives of two severely undernourished calves.

Energized by the returns on investments, Thusinthra is continuing with further improvements so that he can meet his goal of increasing the milk yield to 100 liters per day by the end of the year. He has started the construction of a new cattle shed that will create separate spaces for the milking cows and dry cows (late-stage pregnant cows that are not being milked in preparation for calving). Putting the manure to good use, he is also constructing a bio-gas system near the new cattle shed to produce natural energy. A smiling but humble Thusinthra added, "I had a vision, but I had no idea really of how to achieve it. Now I understand the changes I need to make, and I see a clear path on how to achieve my goals".

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.