

Seruwaia's Dedication a Testament of Strength



Seruwaia Kabukabu with calves on her farm

It takes fortitude and determination to strive towards unfamiliar territory, even more so, it is a test of character to devote oneself to realizing the dreams and aspirations of a loved one and having it take precedence over your own.

The dream was that of Sakiusa Tuisausau, of Waikalou in Serea, Naitasiri who had always bemoaned the loss of his family's dairy farm a decade ago. The farm, located at Waimalua in Naitasiri had to

close due to financial constraints.

The family relocated to Suva shortly afterwards with Sakiusa taking up a job as a bus driver but he remained adamant that they return to their farm to pick up from where they had left off and through the perseverance of his wife, Seruwaia Kabukabu, their fortunes turned, and seven years later the family returned to resume their dairy farming on the exact same farm.

Seruwaia's unwavering support and

commitment towards her husband's dream to try their hand once more at farming, successfully eventuated with them recently marking the two year anniversary of their dairy farm supplying milk to the market.

For the 40-year-old woman who hails from Bau, Tailevu, helping to realize her husband's vision was something she had devoted herself to.

"This farm was started a long time ago by my husband's grandparents, but it went bankrupt and closed down in 2008," she said.

"We returned to the village and our farm in 2015 and decided to start our farm again because this was something my husband had always wanted as this was our family farm years ago; it was also my aim to revive this farm because it was my husband's passion as he was a dairy farmer at heart," she added.

Despite having little knowledge on managing a dairy farm, Ms. Kabukabu accepted the new challenge.

"Prior to returning to the farm, I had no idea about dairy farming, how and what it takes to operate on a daily basis. I came here and learnt on the go with the help of the women who were already in the dairy business - I attended trainings, workshops and field days organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and did my own research and findings which helped me to become the dairy farmer I am today," she smiled.

"When I came back here in 2015, the area was covered in bush. I slowly started to clear the land by cutting down the trees,

planting pastures for the cattle and made my own fencing post and own fence just to start off with" she said.

"I then started buying cattle from the savings my husband and I had while I was running a canteen and we reinvested those savings back into the dairy farm; this is the second year for me supplying milk where I started my farm with 3 cattle and slowly increased the number of stock, and today I have a total of 30 cattle within 3 years," said Ms. Kabukabu.

"I started supplying 30 litres of milk per day last year when I started milking my cows and recently I have started supplying about 60 Liters per day, I have doubled the supply in this short period of time," she confidently adds.

With her rapid progression in the industry during this short time-span, she believes farmers should take the responsibility in looking after the cattle on their farms, especially with the ongoing risk of diseases.

"Farmers should move with the time and adopt new techniques and technologies that are taking place in the farming industry, Government has stepped up and has helped dairy farmers a lot, through regular visits by Agriculture officers and by conducting regular Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) and Brucellosis tests on the farms," she said.

"TB and Brucellosis is a farmers responsibility to prevent as the farmer is responsible for keeping their cattle confined in their farm and also to get their animals tested,

farmers should be aware of the outbreak and once they've identify the infected ones, it can be removed so that TB and Brucellosis is not spread to other cattle or neighboring farms.

Ms. Kabukabu acknowledged that the Ministry of Agriculture was trying its best to help farmers steer the dairy industry forward with its limited resources; "Government is supporting dairy farmers by conducting workshops, field days, trainings and by supplying assistance, by providing fencing materials and building milking sheds."

"I am grateful to the Ministry of Agriculture for supporting and encouraging dairy farmers and especially for supporting me when I started as I was totally new to this industry," Seruwaia said.

"The Ministry of Agriculture has supported me a lot through technical support, providing a milking shed, fencing posts and barbed wire for my farm. I was also provided with an electric fence from Prime Consultants and that has only boosted my confidence in my farming capabilities," she added.

Seruwaia Kabukabu now owns a total of 120 acres of land in which 60 acres is currently occupied by her cattle while the rest is being cleared to extend their farm further in order to increase the number of her stock and with her continued confidence in the dairy sector despite the many setbacks it has been forced to endure, Seruwaia is a female dairy farmer who can certainly achieve it all.

Calf Management



A feeding calf at the livestock research station in Koronivia

Successful rearing of young calves is vital to the success of a dairy farming enterprise. Calves are the future replacement stocks for cows and bulls. It is therefore important that they are reared economically to ensure early maturity. Mortality of calves (up to one month) should be kept below 5% by proper practices including adequate feeding. Taking care of calves during the milk-feeding phase is possibly the most management intensive facet of the dairy operation, but one of the most important.

Unlike management of older animals,

where management lapses can reduce growth rates or milk production, even small mistakes with the very young calf can cause death. Additionally, the health of the calf, the development of its digestive tract, and growth and development of its body during this period influence subsequent performance.

Good practices for new calves

Farmers should be vigilant with the pregnant cow one or two days before the expected date of calving. If it is planned to separate the calf from the mother at birth, newborn calves must be cleaned with a

clean dry towel or clean and dry hay/straw. In addition to drying the calf, this stimulates respiration and blood circulation. Remove mucus from the nose and mouth to assist breathing and, holding up the rear legs of the calf, let the head hang down to release any liquid in the lungs, mouth or nose. Cut the navel leaving two to three inches from the stalk, squeeze out the contents, dip the navel in tincture of iodine and tie it off using clean thread to prevent local infection. Care should be repeated until the navel has dried out. It is important for prevention of navel-ill, joint-ill and calf scour.

Allow the cow to feed the calf with colostrum, preferably within 1 to 2 hours after birth. If the cow dies or has insufficient colostrum, the calf should be given colostrum from other cows or artificial colostrum.

The optimum time for absorption of antibodies through the calf's small intestine is in the first 6 to 8 hours. The quantity of colostrum fed to the calf should be about 10% of its body weight. It is essential that the calf receives enough colostrum during the first 12 to 24 hours to prevent early infection. The colostrum is high in nutritive value and it contains antibodies from the cow's immune system which gives the calf passive resistance against many infections.

In general, removal of the calf from the dam should occur after calving to the calf pen which should be dry and clean. Straw for bedding must be clean and dry and should be changed regularly. In some cases, farmers rearing crossbred dairy cattle leave the calf to suck milk directly from the dam during the first three to four days before being separated from it. This may not be possible in some local cows as the maternal instinct in these animals is very strong making it very disruptive to separate the calf once the dam has seen it.

If possible calves should be housed in pairs or groups as this is important for their social development. If they have to be housed singly for example for disease control, they should be in close proximity and able to see each other. For calves separated from their mothers, feed whole milk/milk replacer twice or preferably thrice a day in amounts sufficient to meet the nutritional requirements. A standard allowance is 10% of body weight up to 56 days, 20% up to 65 days and 40% up to 75 days, after which whole milk can be discontinued. Milk should be fed using a bottle with a

nipple rather than a bucket, and the bottle should be washed and sanitized after every feeding.

Start training the calf to take concentrate and roughage after one week of age. Solid food stimulates rumen development. In the pen, clean water must be available at all times. Calves can be numbered using an ear-tag. These procedures should be done in the first few weeks. Branding, nose ringing and tail docking should not be used. Disbudding (removal of horn buds) should be avoided if possible.

If it is necessary, it should preferably be done within a week and not later than two weeks after birth by a veterinary surgeon/trained person using a hot iron/electric dehorner under anesthesia and with pain control afterwards. Dehorning (removal of horns later in life after they are fully formed) is traumatic and should not be practiced except on veterinary advice. If castration is necessary, it should preferably be done within a week and not later than two months after birth. Pain relief should be applied.

Take adequate precautionary measures to prevent navel-ill, diarrhoea (scours) and respiratory infection (pneumonia) in calves which are the most common causes of morbidity and mortality in calves. As the calf may start nibbling solid feed in the second week of life, good quality green fodder may be offered early in life. In addition, concentrate mixture at the rate of 1 kg per 100 kg of body weight can be offered from the first month.

Parasite control is important. Weaning from milk should take place at about three to four months of age or when the calf is able to eat enough roughage and concentrate to meet its requirement. All necessary interventions must be made to avoid heat and cold stress in young calves.

