

Manasa's mutton dream



Manasa with his livestock on his farm in Bua

Ambition and a strong will are all one ever needs to accomplish their goals and dreams.

This rings true for Manasa Rasalato of Narago in the province of Bua, who has ambitions to supply locally produced lamb to local markets in order to offset the trade deficit of importing mutton.

Though he began his own journey as a sugarcane farmer and had faced significant challenges when switching from cane to livestock farming, Mr. Rasalato has since experienced gradual success, the basis from which he has set his sights on providing a steady supply of mutton for

local demands.

Even at the ripe old age of 64, Manasa's steadfast belief in, and bond to his livestock farm is unwavering, as he has on numerous occasions rejected his own family's appeal to shun all types of farming and migrate overseas to enjoy the fruits of his years of labour.

"Fiji imports millions of dollars-worth of lamb every year, my goal is to reduce that and contribute what I can to the economy by supplying locally produced lamb to local markets.

"I was a school drop-out, and from then I would help my father on our farm,

as he was a cattle farmer, and I am thankful that from an early age, I learnt a lot from him about livestock farming," he shared.

"I was a cane farmer for almost 12 years in Seaqaqa, and I had my children to help me in the cane fields," Manasa added.

In time, his children moved onto further their education and he unfortunately failed to secure the services of labourers to assist in his sugarcane farm; "I then changed my mind because the cane farm was a big responsibility as it required a lot of manpower, and slowly the labour (workers) was becoming a problem as it was becoming difficult to find people who wanted to work on a cane farm," he laments.

"I then searched for land to start livestock farming, because it is quite easy, as the only thing you have to do is to plant the grass for the animals and you don't have to worry about adding manure or fertilizer to the paddock like we used to do on our cane farm, where the cost of production was high as compared to livestock farming," said Mr. Rasalato.

He managed to secure 120 acres of land and dove headfirst towards his dream of operating and managing a commercial livestock farm in Narago, Bua.

With twelve sheep, 22 goats and just one breeder, Manasa began his mission, and in the span of 5 years, he has now accumulated a total of 372 goats, 210 sheep and 13 cattle, which make up the roll of his current stock on the ground.

He accredits his success and now formidable livestock farming prowess to the unending support of loved ones; "I came here with 2 of my kids on this farm to start off with me and we spent about 7 months in a tent because we didn't have the house back then," he remembers.

"We then bought some roofing iron and timber, to build a small makeshift house. Looking back, I can say that even my manure shed on our sugarcane farm in Seaqaqa was much better than the house we had," he said.

"I slowly started to sell some of the livestock and then slowly extended my farm and built my house from the sale of the livestock, all with the support from my children," he added.

Through his sacrifice and struggle, he has raised his children and put them through the best possible education he could afford, and his children have not forgotten their patriarchs' commitment to them during their formative years.

"My children don't want me to stay on and continue farming. They've constantly asked me to move abroad with them but I can't, staying on the farm makes me feel good because I belong here, this is my life, I work and I sweat and live a free rewarding life. I can also contribute to the economy of our country from farming, rather than sitting down in another country and doing nothing," he affirmed.

The support and assistance shown to him by the Ministry of Agriculture has not gone unnoticed as Mr Rasalato acknowledged the Ministry's input has led to the calibre of livestock farming that he is today known for.

"I appreciate the hours spent here on my farm, the continuous visits, the support and effort shown by the Ministry of Agriculture in supporting me and guiding me to become what I am today," he said.

"Invaluable knowledge was shared to me and the technical advice provided to me was telling, as without it, I doubt I couldn't have gone any farther with my livestock farm. The Ministry also provided

me with fencing materials and materials for the goat shed," he added.

"I am particularly supportive of Government's import substitution initiative, especially for livestock as we continue to import huge amounts of lamb annually, I will always try to do my part to lessen this import bill.

The grandfather and father of 5 has echoed a resounding word of advice, farmers especially youths are to make maximum use of their land.

"You will always struggle before you progress, so don't just sit and say that I am struggling. My only advice to our young people in rural areas and in the villages, there is potential in the land, there is money in the land and if you can learn to appreciate it rather than choosing to remain idle, you will realize what it has to offer," he encouraged.

He has set his sights on maintaining a steady supply of farm fresh affordable meat produce for local markets and looks capable of meeting these targets.

"The only thing I want to achieve in the future is to be a model farmer for the Northern Division. One of the vision and goal I wrote in my book and diary is that the product of this land, the meat, will be sold in all the supermarkets in Vanua Levu, around Fiji and also to be exported in the coming years," he said.

"That's my goal and I am going to achieve it, I will work for it until I cannot physically continue to do so, that's when I will hand over the reins of my farm to my family," he said with a smile.

He currently sells his stock at the farm gate and earns approximately \$14,000-\$15,000 annually as his ambition to extend his farm continues. He also employs 1 full time labourer on his farm and is also assisted by one of his sons.

Sheep Farming

BREED

Originally developed in Fiji

- Cross between Blackbelly Barbados and Wiltshire horn
- No wool, lean meat, woolly
- Good source of protein
- Good mothering ability and produce single, twins and triplets lambs
- The rams and ewes are very fertile
- Easy to manage
- Can be mated at any time of the year (non seasonal)
- Well adapted to the local environment - tolerant to local climatic conditions
- Lean meat
- Good mothering
- Fertile rams and ewe
- Susceptible to gastro intestinal worms as grow older.

REPRODUCTION & GROWTH

The profitability of a sheep enterprise depends on the number of lambs sold either for meat or as breeding stock. The number raised to market is a reflection of the complete management of the flock throughout the year. One of the critical points in this management cycle is lambing.

Gestation Care

The ewe is required to deliver strong healthy lambs and to have sufficient milk to raise those lambs. Her ability to do this is a reflection of the gestation management. The amount of supplementary feed depends on the size and body condition of the ewes and the quality of forage being fed.

Lambing

The average gestation period for a ewe is 147 days, but some will always be early. The lamb should start breathing at birth. It may need help; check that there is no placenta covering the nostrils or mouth.

A gentle rub over the chest with a towel or straw wisk, tickling the inside of the nostrils with a piece of straw or blowing into the nostrils (do not allow your lips to

come in contact with the wet lamb while doing this) will often stimulate breathing.

In the first few days of a lambs life there are several procedures that should be carried out.

Navels

The navel of the new born lamb needs to be disinfected as soon after birth as possible. The untreated navel is an excellent route for infectious agents to enter the lamb causing internal abscessation or joint ill. An iodine solution is the most common disinfectant used. It is either sprayed onto the navel or the navel is dipped in a small container of the solution. If dipping the navels, replace the disinfectant solution in the container after every tenth lamb.

Tail Docking (Optional)

The tails need to be docked before the lamb is seven days old. The tail can be removed with rubber ring. The docked tail should cover the anus of the ram or the vulva of the ewe. A good guide is to remove it at the joint in the tail bones just beyond the web on the underside of the tail.

Castration (Optional)

If the market lambs are to be kept beyond three months of age, they need to be castrated.

Again, whether rubber rings, crushing or cut and pull is used, this should be done before seven days of age.

Whether tattoos, ear tags, or ear notching is used, the lamb must be identified before it leaves the lambing pen.

MANAGEMENT

Fostering

For any one of a variety of reasons, a lamb may need to be fostered onto another ewe. If possible fostering should be considered as an option before bottle feeding for the orphan.

Fostering should be as soon after birth as possible. If the lamb has not dried off, so much the better. If fostering from a set of triplets, choose the strongest lamb. Keep the ewe and the fostered lamb in a lambing pen until you are certain that the adoption has succeeded.

To persuade the ewe to accept the lamb, one of several techniques can be used. Rub the lamb in the placenta of the ewe's own lamb; if you are replacing a dead lamb, put its skin onto the adoptee; if the ewe still refuses, she can be put into a head gate to prevent her pushing the lamb away when it attempts to suckle. After a few days, the ewe will usually accept the lamb.

Feeding Sheep

Nutrition plays a major role in the overall productivity, health, and well-being of the sheep flock. During the grazing season, sheep are able to meet their nutrient requirements from pasture and a salt and mineral supplement. Permanent pasture should be the predominant source of nutrition for the sheep flock.

Intensive sheep production systems where the sheep are housed and fed harvested feeds are not as profitable as more extensive production systems where they harvest their own feed. When a sufficient quantity of forage is available, sheep are able to meet their nutrient requirements from forage alone along with a supplemental source of salt and minerals.

Legumes should be planted on permanent pastures to improve the quantity and quality of forage produced during the grazing season. Sheep prefer to graze leafy, vegetative growth that is 2 to 6 inches tall rather than stemmy, more mature forages.

Pasture growth is not distributed evenly throughout the year. Rotational grazing programs designed for the movement of sheep every 10 to 14 days are instituted to

improve both pasture and lamb production. More intensive rotational grazing systems where higher stocking rates are used help to promote more complete forage utilization, but also require greater input costs in the form of fence and water and may result in higher levels of internal parasitism, increased risk of coccidiosis, and impaired lamb performance

Considerations

One of the basic aspects of a sheep farming operation is to make sure that ewes become pregnant and have lambs. It is important to understand the basic physiology of the reproductive cycle to ensure that management decisions do not prevent ewes from becoming pregnant. Conception rate varies between season, age, breed and lambing system. Understanding the effect of these factors will enable you to determine what a good conception rate is for your farm.

Good conception rates are essential for the profitability of a sheep farm. If conception rates are not high, consider and review the many factors that influence the number of ewes lambing and the number of lambs born, including age, breed, lambing interval, health, nutrition, stress and the ability of the ram.

Common Diseases

The two common disease in Sheep are foot rot and worms.

Foot Rot - Overgrown hoofs can trapped dirt and mud thus weakening the hoofs and allow foreign objects to penetrate and injuring the foot.

Signs - Sheep may be found to be limping, Loss appetite

Immediate Impact - Sheep will drastically lose weight. Reproductive performance will decrease.

Prevention - Avoid grazing in wet and

boggy areas, continuous trimming of foot every 5 - 6 months.

Treatment - Trim the overgrown hoofs and treat with copper sulphate mixed with Vaseline. Dip the trimmed foot in a 10% Formalin solution.

Worms in Sheep

Effects of Internal Parasites/Worms

- Animal becomes weak, eats less, can die
- losses weight, does not gain weight, loss of production
- develops diarrhoea, which causes dehydration
- Rough coat
- mucus membrane of eyes become pale
- develops swellings under jaw or under abdomen

Treatment & Control

Drench with anthelmintics (Fenbendazole/ Nilverm) and strict paddock rotation. In case of severe infection contact Livestock Officer at you nearest Agriculture office.

Records

A record is the permanent account kept for information. For identification, safety and movement of the stocks, record keeping is relevant in all entity.