



VIJAY PRAKASH – THE MILK MAN OF WAIDEWARA



Mr. Vijay Prakash at his dairy farm in Waidewara, Wainibuka.

"If you want to run a dairy farm, you will need to consider the welfare of the livestock as they're your main producers and you must be mindful of your workers, who together with your livestock, are your biggest assets."

This is what 65-year-old Vijay Prakash of Waidewara in Wainibuka lives by as he milks his dairy cows once a day, 365 days a year with no exceptions.

"Operating a dairy farm is time-consuming work and it takes patience and perseverance, and because we love doing it, we have managed to learn a few things," he said.

Vijay grew up on his parents' dairy paddock a few meters down the road before pursuing a career as a lawman and joining the Fiji

Police Force.

During his stint as a Police Officer, he was posted to Ba, Lautoka, Vatukoula, and Suva before he resigned to start his private security company, Professional Security Services in 2000. His experiences taught him and throughout life's never-ending lesson, he always had the urge to return to dairy farming.

"I became what I had always wanted to be when I grew up, but in my heart, the passion for dairy farming remained and because of other opportunities that were available I knew I could slot it in and I was confident I could achieve it," he said.

Following the turmoil of the 2000 coup, there was a dire need for security services in the country

and Vijay struck while the iron was hot.

"I formed my own security company and in partnership with various institutions and offices, in 2014, I returned to Waidewara to continue the dairy farm," said Vijay.

Mr. Prakash purchased 54-acres of land and grazed his 70 stock, 20 of which were milking cows with the assistance of 2 laborers.

"When I started the Navolivoli farm, I followed the traditional practices I'd learnt from my parents and over-time learnt new techniques from places I visited. On my trips to New Zealand I would make sure to visit farms and question how they did things there, I adapted their concepts and management techniques," he said.

"For Fiji, we need to learn best practices from countries like this as they've learnt how to improve their production, and when it's practiced here in Fiji, a great difference can be made."

Milking is done once, daily, on the farm with unadulterated attention fully given to the cows for the production of quality milk.

"Although the days can be long and things don't always go as planned, my focus is consistently on the cows and my goal is always to keep them as happy, healthy, and comfortable as possible," said Vijay.

"Milking is done once daily every morning, apart from other factors such as health and the life of the cows, it is the calves that I

want to be fed too," he said.

"We follow proper time management in the milking routine for milk quality and proper hygiene to prevent the spread of mastitis disease," said Vijay.

"It is this attention to detail and care for our farm and cows that allow us to provide quality milk to the Fiji Dairy Limited."

During peak warm milking seasons, a cow from the Navolivoli farm can produce 10 liters per day, which drops to 7 liters during colder seasons.

"Dairy products and milk consumers today want to know where their milk is from, how it was made and the processes along the way, so whenever we are about to milk a cow we always keep these customers in mind, so hygiene and other practices are all very important," said Vijay.

He has also transformed trash into reusable items for his dairy cows, slowly upgrading his milking shed to achieve another target of his, which is to have an operational internal grazing shed.

"These improvements are some of the steps taken on how we care for and manage our cows, we try to continuously improve the process - from what they are fed and how they are feed, to the breeding practices and how to keep them comfortable," he said.

"When they are let out to graze, we do not know if they're eating well or not, and this will enable them to eat well and produce good quality milk," Vijay shared.

"I transformed a bathtub that was left unused on the roadside, and converted it by connecting pipes for their drinking tub as they make the long walk to the milking shed," he said.

"The cow has a strong need to rest and to be prepared physically for milking and it is more efficient when the cows and the people interact smoothly."

He has also improved his sheds' standard by installing a rolling gate, and due to his passion for his livestock farming venture, he has divided his pasture among his herd's headcount of 20 sheep and 40 goats and has reserved 5 acres for his newly planted Setaria grass for the animal's feed. "To add to their feed I have started to plant Setaria and am also planning to venture into Mulato grass," he said.

"The most important thing is to take care of your livestock for them to produce well as they are just like children growing up, and I also apply the same treatment to my workers as they are the biggest assets in the farm's management," he said with a smile.

"We can plan all we want, but to implement that plan is critical, which is why I hold my workers in high regard because through their action, only then can these plans bear rewards and I've witnessed it through this dairy farm, which has not only provided us an income and a consistent supply of healthy milk; it has also taught us to be humble and patient, the rewards will come in the end."

WHAT IS LEPTOSPIROSIS?

What is it?

Leptospirosis is a disease caused by bacteria which live in the kidneys and genitals of many types of animals.

Leptospirosis is a zoonotic disease, meaning it can affect both humans and animals.

What are the signs and symptoms in people?

Leptospirosis usually starts with flu-like symptoms. Symptoms usually start within 5-14 days, but can appear as soon as 2 days, or up to 30 days after contact with the bacteria.

It can cause a wide range of symptoms, but many of these can be mistaken for other diseases. In addition, some infected persons may have no symptoms at all.

Symptoms include:

- High fever
- Headache
- Chills
- Muscle aches
- Vomiting
- Jaundice (yellow skin and eyes)
- Red eyes

- Abdominal Pain
- Diarrhoea
- Rash

Who is most at risk?

Anyone can get Leptospirosis, but some are more at risk due to their location and their work in Fiji. The cyclone season also increases the risk of Leptospirosis due to higher rainfall and flooding.

Some examples of workers at risk:

- Farmers
- Crop farmers
- Slaughterhouse workers
- Fish workers
- Dairy farmers

However, household transmission of leptospirosis has become increasingly common in urban areas with poor overall sanitation infrastructures.

How could I get infected?

Rats, dogs, cats, cattle, pigs, horses and mongooses can carry and spread infection but some animals may have no symptoms of the disease.

Cattle with leptospirosis sometimes

abort in the last trimester or you might notice a sudden drop in milk production in a large number of your milking cows.

People can get infected by contact with water, flood, mud, food which has been contaminated by urine or body fluids from infected animals. Rats visiting the kitchen of homes can also contaminate food and utensils with feces and urine. The bacteria can survive in soil or water for weeks, even months.

Pet animals particularly unvaccinated dogs can easily get infected from their environment or from rats and mongooses. And humans handling their sick pets are at risk of getting infected. Spreading the disease from one person to another is possible but not common.

How does infection start?

The bacteria gets into your body through cuts/ scratches or broken skin or through the eyes, mouth or nose.

You can get it while:

- Drinking contaminated water

- Wading in flood waters
- Playing in rivers or lakes
- Hunting
- Gardening in farm soil, working with crops
- Walking barefoot in paddocks or gardens
- Touching sick animals
- Eating or drinking contaminated food or water
- Smoking without washing your hands after animal contact
- Cleaning out sheds where animals live especially rats, mice, mongoose etc.
- Working in forests
- Sharing utensils with sick family members

How serious is it?

Without treatment, Leptospirosis can lead to kidney damage, meningitis (inflammation of the membrane around the brain and spinal cord), liver failure, respiratory distress, and even death.

If you or anyone you know has any of the above symptoms, you should seek urgent medical attention at your nearest healthcare facility.

Early treatment by a Doctor is

key to preventing complications and deaths. Any cattle abortions should be reported to your locality officers and veterinarians of the Ministry of Agriculture for further investigation.

How do I protect myself and others?

- Avoiding wading/swimming in waters that may be contaminated with animal urine, especially flood waters.
- Wearing protective clothing and footwear when working with livestock.
- Separating households from livestock e.g. through the use of fences/pens.
- Regular household cleaning.
- Getting rid of rats in the household.
- Keeping your food and eating/cooking utensils away from rats and pets
- Washing fruits and vegetables.
- Take care during milking of cows to ensure urine does not splash into eyes or mouth.