

Seruwaia's Dedication a Testament of Strength

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.



Seruwaia Kabukabu with her stocks at her farm in Naitasiri

Animal Health and Wealth during Natural Disasters

Animals are an integral part of the society and also get affected by Natural disasters, here are some of the points that Livestock owners should keep in mind during these times of adversities.

Livestock Health (including welfare)

There will be possibilities of many livestock diseases propping up at these times which will eventually lead to losses. Some which may include:

1. Foot Conditions

Animals such as goats, sheep and cattle that are in these flood areas can be exposed to the bacteria which cause foot rot (*Fusobacterium necrophorum*) and foot abscess (*Bacteriodes nodosus*) conditions. These bacteria lie dormant awaiting the favorable conditions, such as flooding, to cause the foot condition.

The feet of the livestock are soaked and softened by being in the water hence making it easier for the bacteria to penetrate and cause the condition.

Apart from this, since the animal's nutrition (protein) is not optimum due to the grass being covered by the water and silt/mud, the opportunity for the bacteria to thrive will be higher as the immunity levels are challenged due to starvation and hypothermia (cold).

Advice:

- Move the animal to higher grounds in sheltered areas and if possible check/observe for any lameness or limping.
- Contact your nearest Animal Clinic for a Locality Livestock officer to have a look at your herd.
- Copper sulphate paste could be applied to the feet to harden the skin of the feet to prevent infection.
- A prophylactic/preventative dose of penicillin injection can be given to the animals. Please contact your nearest Locality Livestock officer or the Principal Veterinary Officer, if you need to.
- Provide your animals with plenty of grass and clean water.

2. Diarrhoea

The incidence of diarrhoea is going to increase as the flood levels are going to recede. This will be due to lack of quality and clean food material available for the livestock to graze and as mentioned above will lead to a challenged immune system due to starvation and hypothermia. The diarrhoea could be due to two reasons - internal parasites and bacterial infections. These two diarrhoea causing agents will be plentiful in numbers as the immune system is challenged. The diarrhoea caused by these two agents is different in nature.

Advice:

- Farmers and livestock owners are advised to contact the nearest Animal Health Clinic for ascertain the type of diarrhoea, if any, is present.
- Hint:** smelly pasty diarrhoea is caused by bacteria.
- There are Antibacterial, Antidiarrhoeal drugs and Anthelmintic drugs available in clinics throughout Fiji.
- A locality livestock officer should be contacted promptly to prevent any losses of livestock.
- As a general rule all livestock should be drenched (oral medication for stomach worms every 21 days).
- Provide your animals with adequate food and water.
- Animals should be moved to higher grounds in sheltered areas. And returned at least 7-10 days after the flood waters have receded.

3. Leptospirosis

This disease is as important for humans as it is for animals because humans can also contract Leptospirosis. The flood waters coming in from the interior and mountains, where the feral/wild pigs live, will bring in the leptospira bacteria (spirochaete) down to the farming areas. Leptospira loves stagnant water.

Advice

- Keep animals away from flood affected areas for at least 7 days after

the flood waters have receded.

- Immediately advise your local livestock officers if any jaundice (Yellowing of the mucus membranes) or blood in the urine is noticed.
- Wash your hands properly with soap and clean water, after handling any dead animals.
- For humans
 - i. Please ensure that you are wearing covered shoes/gumboots when wading through stagnant/pooled water.
 - ii. Wear gloves if you have to work in water logged areas.
 - iii. Avoid swimming/bathing in pooled/stagnant water
 - iv. Boil all drinking water.

4. Hypothermia (cold)

Leaving your animals out exposed to the rain and flood waters will lead to the animals being exposed to cold eventually leading to pneumonia and death. Remember that these animals will not have eaten for a time period and are immune suppressed.

Advise

- Move your animals to higher grounds out of the flooded areas.
- If possible, move your animals into shaded areas where they can get some shelter from the rain and the wind.
- Ensure that the animals get adequate feed (cut grass) and water.
- Contact your nearest Animal Health Clinic for assistance.

Others to take note of:

1. Dispose off all dead carcasses either by burying or burning.
2. Don't throw in the rivers or streams as you will be spreading the disease, if any.
3. Report all deaths/sickness in livestock (cattle, horses, goats, sheep, chickens, Ducks, dogs, cats etc.) to your nearest Animal Health Clinics promptly.

Caring for Animals in Natural Disasters

General considerations:

1. Ensure that your animals have access to clean food and water. This can be in the form of pasture on paddocks located on hills, supplements and drums/water troughs.
2. Keep animals away from flood waters, as this can be a source of contamination or toxin.
3. Be careful when handling animals, particularly livestock and horses, as they may be frightened or disoriented.
4. Be aware of animals that stray on the roads for your own safety.
5. Monitor your animals and take note of any injuries etc. Contact your nearest Veterinarian or Para-veterinarian.
6. Animals found starving should not be allowed to suffer, ensure that they are fed or relocated. Otherwise, contact your nearest Veterinarian or government Para-veterinarian to humanely euthanize the animal.

Displaced and Lost animals

During flooding and heavy rainfall, animals may become displaced or lost when homes, boundaries or sheds are damaged.

1. For lost and found companion animals, you can contact Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

(SPCA) or a government veterinary clinic in the Animal Health & Production Division.

2. If you find a stray livestock on your property that cannot be identified, contact your nearest Animal Health & Production office.
3. Ensure that your animals have proper identification; brands for cattle and horses, dog license tags, goat and sheep ear tags etc.
4. Animals affected by natural disasters may be easily frightened or traumatised. Be careful when returning them and only do so after major activities have been conducted e.g. debris clearing, removal of uprooted trees etc.

Care for Companion Animals during Natural Disaster

1. Ensure that your pet can be identified by collar tags or dog license tags, and ensure that the dog license is valid.
2. Bring your pets into your compound or a sheltered space in advance of any natural disaster.
3. Dogs and cats can become frightened of unfamiliar noises, ensure that they are confined to a safe and dry place.
4. Have food and water available for your pets and avoid feeding them any contaminated food or water.

