



A DAY WITH A DUTCH FARMER

HERD IN HERD WITH PETER BJEN – by David Maina

As part of its highly placed localization agenda, SNV through its dairy program (Kenya Market-led dairy Program - KMDP) entered into a collaboration with Netherlands Senior Expert Program (PUM) to build the capacity of its project team. The implementation plan includes incoming mission for the appropriately skilled experts to the project areas but also an opportunity for outward exposure missions. Between 19th and 30th August, 2014, two local consultants Stanley Koech (Eldosirikwa) and David Maina (Perfometer) were involved in an outward mission that was planned to cover different components of Dutch dairy practice. The mission was planned and hosted by PUM representatives Frans Ettema, Jaap de vrij and Halbe Klijnstra. Among the places visited were farms, a vet centre, feed consultants, accountants, fodder contractors, academic institutions and a vocational training centre. To make it both valuable and relevant, the exposure program was planned as per the expectations sent to PUM representatives by the two visiting local consultants. This was my day in Peter's farm.

Peter Bjen's farm at a glance:

- A total herd of 500 animals, 330 in one farm and 170 in the other excluding the young stock.
- Started with 80 cows in 2000, grew to 180 in 2004, 260 in 2007 and 500 in 2013.
- Farm is operated by 4 people, three family members and one employee.
- The herd's calving interval is 380 days
- Daily production of 8400 litres of milk per day with an average daily production of 20 litres which he considers low.
- Sells milk at 39.25 euro cents,
- Daily labor per hour is valued at 16 EUR (Ksh. 1920)

As a dairy consultant coming from Kenya, I was very eager to see the other side of dairy farming. In Kenya, the dairy sector is experiencing high growth but being dominated by small holders (2-3 cows) who are also mixed farmers, they have limited motivation and ability to concentrate on the dairy business to a point of optimization or high efficiency. I arrived at Peter's farm before 9 am and was there until 5pm.

Peter works on the farm with his two parents and one hired worker. I liked the way each of these four understand their role in the farm. On this day, the father was busy with the feeding, picking the feed with the wagon and delivering on the array, the mother was busy shaving the tails of the lactating cows a practice that she does twice a year. Both Peter and the hired worker are involved in inspecting the herd, and performing the routine practices. Every day at 6am Peter begins by milking, scrapping of manure and checking a dry cows (far off and close-up herd). He checks hooves once every week and all the cows that are 100 days into lactation are set aside for hoof-trimming.

Quite different from our sector in Kenya, is Peter's proficiency with data management and how he makes use of this data to make decisions with the assistance of consultants. He can literary explain every section of his farm in numbers.

For Peter, there is no trial and error in feeding, he pays for lab services (BLGG) to analyze each cutting, then submits the data to Farm Consult (the feeding advisors) who then complete the ration formulations. His farm is a member of EDF, where he submits his data and in return, gets to compare his operational efficiency with other member farms. The comparative EDF data is also useful to consultants for identifying major variations between farms (off the curve) which could a point to a problem that requires attention. For me, this day was the most transformative - above all.



"I work with multiple consultants on the farm, a veterinary, a feeding advisor, and the accounting firm. But the feeding advisor is the most important to me. Yet I don't pay the consultants directly, but I buy all the feeds from their company so I believe that their payment is factored in - in the cost of the feed". Peter Bjen, a 38 year old farmer and a member of the European Dairy Farmers (EDF).

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For me, this is not just a way of earning a living, I like to be with the cows, to see them healthy and happy...

...Even in winter, I don't stay in-doors, I like to walk around and inspect them". Peter Bjen

Peter can explain every bit of his farm in numbers. The cost (per cow) of the barn, the production of maize silage, milk production per day, cost of labor, cost of producing litre of milk, the dimensions of different sections of the barns, and cost of each service to a litre of milk.