

DELIVERY OF TECHNICAL INFORMATION TO SMALLHOLDER DAIRY FARMERS IN KIAMBU DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted to determine the sources and delivery of technical information to smallholder dairy farmers in Kiambu District. Sixty-three farmers in three wealth groups (rich, medium, poor) of 21 farmers each from three different locations, were selected at random from maps drawn by communities. A structured questionnaire was administered to collect information on farmers' level of exposure to different dairy information sources and their involvement in extension activities during 1997. Preliminary results indicate that most poor farmers (66%) relied on neighbors as their primary information source. Field days run by dairy cooperative societies were the most important organized information delivery channel for poor (28%) and medium (38%) farmers. Private and co-operative veterinary services concentrated on rich farms with 33% of these households having contact compared with only 14% of poor households. The government veterinary or livestock services contacted less than 20% of households either in farm visits or field days. Besides visits by private veterinary officers to wealthy farmers the frequency of contact with livestock professionals was therefore limited for all communities. Preliminary conclusions are that for Kiambu, which has a well established smallholder dairy industry, group meetings organized by cooperatives are more likely to reach the poorer sectors of the community. This coupled with frequent neighbour-to-neighbour discussions may currently be the most effective dairy information delivery channel.

Key words: Information, sources, delivery, smallholder, dairy.

INTRODUCTION

Seasonal inadequacy of the quantity and quality of feed available are the major problems facing dairy cattle production (Preston and Leng, 1997). Utilization of feed that is available is constrained by failure to use management practices that can improve on livestock output. A variety of feed resources for ruminant livestock are unused, undeveloped and poorly utilized resulting in decreased livestock output. Crop residues such as stover, straws and haulms could be better utilized to improve livestock productivity (Mcintre et. al., 1992).

Inefficient inputs market and inadequate extension services continue to be one of the major constraints facing the growth of the agricultural sector in Kenya. During a study conducted in Kiambu District by Mwangi (1995), farmers cited lack of technical information as a major constraint to dairy farming. The most important initiative in Kenya is the government extension service. Livestock extension services were delivered under donor assisted government projects such as The National Extension Program (1981 - 1997) and The National Dairy Development Project (NDDP: 1980 - 1995). Delivery methods included activities such as farm visits, farmers' field days, tours, courses and demonstrations. In addition, the NDDP also produced leaflets and booklets with dairy extension messages. Recent changes include privatization of veterinary and artificial insemination services. In addition, crop and livestock extension services have been integrated. Other sources of information include neighbors, co-operative societies, mass media, and non-governmental organizations.

Studies conducted in Kiambu district by KARI/ILRI/MALDM indicated that <50% of the

farmers were in contact with the government extension service. This was despite the district having been served by the two projects since their inception. Kiambu District, having the most developed smallholder dairy system in Africa should have the most efficient extension system. The purpose of this study was therefore to document the sources of information, their messages and their methods of delivery to the smallholder dairy farmers in Kiambu District.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out by use of a structured questionnaire. Informal meetings with groups (about 20) of farmers were held in three locations selected according their level of exposure to formal extension services. The farmers identified what they considered as dairy technologies, their sources of information and the methods used in information delivery. This information was used to develop the questionnaire. From community maps with households stratified by wealth status (drawn by the farmers), 21 households (7 rich, 7 medium and 7 poor) were randomly selected from each location. These households were used to carry out a cross-sectional survey to collect information on resource availability, sources of information and farmers' participation in extension activities over the previous year.

RESULTS:

Although most of the farmers said they had access to information on both animal production and health, <25% had real contact with any source. Among all the farmers interviewed, the dairy co-operatives came out as the most important source of technical information (56%), followed by neighbors (54%) and private veterinary officers. (38%). The government extension service was cited as an important source by 23% of the farmers and was more important only in Location 1. In 1997, <20% of the farmers had been involved in extension activities organized by the government and most of them (65%) from location 1. Farmers of medium wealth status were the ones who had more contact with government extension services. Most poor farmers (66%) obtained technical information from neighbors. Most of the farmers who had had contact with the veterinary services were the rich. Field days organized by the dairy co-operative had been attended by all the wealth groups and by farmers from all the locations in a more balanced manner although only a third of the farmers had been reached this way.

DISCUSSION:

Farmers have more contact with vets. due to the essential nature and quick tangible results of their services; the concentration is on wealthy farmers because of their ability to pay and hence they can consult more often. The government extension service is constrained by insufficient operational funds and low staff to farmer ratio, which currently stands at 1:500 for kiambu (D.L.P.O. Kiambu, 1996), hence the low coverage. The dairy co-operatives, apart from milk marketing, offer other services like input supply, credit facilities, AI. and vet. services hence the great attraction to farmers from all the locations (from the sample: members - 90.5%, non-members - 9.5%). Neighborhood discussions are not limited to time or venue and high population density enhances great farmer coverage. This is in line with studies conducted in Kiambu and other districts by Maarse et. al. (1995) and Miheso V. M. (1998) whereby though the majority of farmers said they had received information from the government extension, at least 25% of the farmers had received information from neighbors. Farmers' field days, being audio-visual tend to pass messages better; they also allow the farmers to interact and learn more from each other.

In conclusion, neighborhood discussions are a very important source of information to all farmers. Farmers' field days should be encouraged and supported as they are an effective method of information delivery and seem to support neighborhood discussions in that once farmers establish rapport at the field day, they continue to exchange any information acquired thereafter. Dairy co-operatives were ranked highly as a source of information and therefore they could effectively be used to supplement the government extension service since they are in contact with farmers in all wealth groups and in all locations. In addition, they already have a service structure in place.

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