

Malagasy Cheese Processor Improves Quality and Sales

Technical assistance and training help IMAMO maximize profits

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IMAMO dairy, or *la laiterie de l'IMAMO*, located about an hour's drive from Madagascar's capital, Antananarivo, has improved its production practices, and its sales, through support from a USDA-funded dairy development program implemented by Land O'Lakes International Development.

From January to July of 2008, IMAMO had reported accrued losses of more than 5,000,000 Ariary, or \$3,000, due to the inability to sell more than 600 kilograms of poor-quality cheese stockpiles. Like many of the processors in Madagascar, Dr. Berthine, the owner of IMAMO, is also a smallholder producing close to 400 liters of milk per day. She sells 200 liters as raw milk in Antananarivo through a dairy shop, uses 40 liters to make yogurt (both set and drinking), and processes the rest for cheese. Dr. Berthine, as other processors, sees cheese as a way of conserving milk, using the extra milk that cannot be sold on the market. Cheese-making methods are rudimentary, however, resulting in a poor-quality product with low market value. In addition to less-than-optimum processing methods, the cheese makers have a problem with availability of quality rennet and cultures. Most producers have not received any technical training on good cheese-making procedures, but instead learn through neighbors or family members.

Interventions

Land O'Lakes assists dairy farmers and processors such as Dr. Berthine to increase the quantity of milk production, improve the quality of milk and dairy products, and diversify production. Land O'Lakes staff became aware of the urgency to save IMAMO from going under. The Processing and Quality Specialist at Land O'Lakes evaluated Dr. Berthine's current processing skills as well as the types of inputs used. It was clear that IMAMO lacked good cheese-making skills as well as the proper equipment such as pH meters to evaluate milk quality. Most cheeses were of low quality, with high water content. The refining room was not appropriately located (above the veterinary supply shop).

The first step was to move all the cheese to a more appropriate room. Dr. Berthine built a small cheese-making plant. Fortunately, she has an air conditioner, so any remaining quality cheese was quickly moved to cool storage. The Land O'Lakes specialist recommended new cultures and ordered rennet directly from the supplier. Pressing was improved, and as for yogurt, better cultures and temperature control were recommended. IMAMO also changed the process for making drinking yogurt, cooling the milk down as soon as possible, making the yogurt at night during lower temperatures, and storing it in the freezer, as consumers prefer a cold finished product such as frozen yogurt.



"I hope Land O'Lakes can train all my family on dairy technologies as this is a family business. We prefer to closely monitor the dairy and ensure quality production. There is really a big difference from before. We sell without a problem, with people appreciating our yogurt and cheeses. Now, we don't have excess stockpiles."

-- Doctor Berthine R.

Results

As a result of this assistance, IMAMO dairy has no large stockpiles of cheese and sells their milk and yogurt without problem. Consumers are always asking for the cheese. Dr. Berthine's objective is to produce and process up to 1,000 liters per day from her own 60 cows. She has prepared a business plan that requires a loan for equipment such as cheese vats and yogurt packaging. Dr. Berthine is confident she will get the loan because she has increased her credibility through the production and sale of better-quality products. The *laiterie de l'IMAMO* hopes to process at least one soft and one hard cheese. In addition, Dr. Berthine has already bought a cream separator and a butter churn.