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Concerns: **Happy cows happy farmers project for Sunga ward, Tanzania 2013**

Reference: Julian Carr

During a previous project (yoghurt and cheese-making) with women from Mambo village, we were surprised to discover the following chronic problems amongst cow farmers: low milk yield of below 2 liters; calving at irregular intervals with resulting long periods with zero milk, and totally inadequate shelter and general sub-standard care for the cows and calves.

It was puzzling as to why African farmers, who otherwise display a highly developed skill in farming methods, were seemingly lacking basic cow management skills. The answer lay in the not-too-distant history of the region.



In 1975, the Tanzanian government was being advised by a German agricultural organization (Lushoto Integrated Development Project). In an effort to combat soil erosion, life-changing environmental policies were introduced in the Usambara Mountain region that impacted its farmers in an unprecedented way. In a three-pronged attack on environmental degradation, the new policy decreed that farmers terrace their steep mountainous fields, plant trees, and, importantly for this project, engage in zero grazing for their cows.

Cows had traditionally been brought to the fields during the day, and taken back into the home at night. The system was primarily non-interventionist, allowing cows to roam the fields at will, choosing their own grass and water, and having a bull available for mating nearby. After 1975, this system of cow management was no longer accepted, and farmers, no doubt not without protestation, were forced to comply.

As a result, cows now had to be kept in an enclosure by the family home, and farmers were now obliged to bring grass and water to the cow. They also now needed to understand the signs when their cow was ready to be serviced by a bull - no simple matter for any farmer in the world. This was a sudden and challenging change to required skills, and demanded more time and organization from the farmers. Evidently, it was all too easily assumed, the knowledge would be easily acquired.



Although statistics are not available, it is evident that the 1975 intervention, led to drastically reduced milk production, less calf births, and lower cow numbers in the Usambara mountains.

Farmers were simply not coping with the new demands of cow management for their animals in 'captivity' and have failed to cope much better ever since.

The HappyCowsHappyFarmers project took shape as a result of this realization.

Goal:

To inform farmers in Sunga district of the ways in which they can better care for their cows and be rewarded with an increase to their milk supply.

Strategy:

- 1: Working with the village Chairmen, we arranged group meetings with farmers in villages within the district of Sunga. The main villages are Mambo, Kukai, Tema, Masereka, Kwemtindi, and Sunga.
- 2: At the end of these group meetings, we offered consultation to individual farmers on site with their cows.

We accepted we are guests in this district. We visited farmers by invitation only. Without their motivation and interest, we felt we, and they, could not succeed. We were trying to change many years of ingrained neglect that we were sure would only change gradually. We encouraged the farmers to ask questions at all times, bring up their problems in discussion. They were assured, they are part of the solution and it is important to work together to achieve results.

Advice:

We advised five basic policies to maximize cow welfare and milk production in cows.

1. Feed your cow clean green(when available) grass. (We called it cow grass) Keep the grass in a bin where it remains clean until eaten.

Green feed is available for almost 9 months of the year in the Usambaras. For the other three months of the year, cows are fed maize stalks and dry grass with very little nutritional value and, thus, milk production will drop during this time.

2. Give your cow and calves clean, warm, water every morning and evening.

The more water cows receive, the more milk they will produce. Cows need water at least twice a day. Make sure it is not too cold. If it needs warming, put the water in the sun during the day.

3. Give your cow one tablespoon of salt every day - best in the water for minimum waste.



4. Understand the signs when it is the right time to send your cow to the bull

Three months after giving birth to a calf, begin looking for the signs that the cow is in heat - swelling, lifting of tail, jumping on other cows, mooing. These signs should appear every month until she is taken successfully to the bull. Do not use a bull which is related to the cow to be made pregnant.

After the calf is born, it should have all the mother's milk for at least two weeks. Thereafter the farmer should share the milk with the calf until it begins to eat grass. Keep it near its mother where both will feel happy. Take the young calf with the sheep to graze (staked) during the day. Make sure it is warm and dry at night. If necessary, take it into the house. Make sure your calf is not afraid of you, by touching it, feeding it by hand and talking to it. Later in life it will be easier to milk.

Milk your cow every 12 hours to maximize your milk.

5. Love your cow - and she will love you in return by giving up her milk.

A cow which is afraid will not give down her milk easily (hidden milk), and she will kick during milking. If she is relaxed and happy, she will give all her milk. To make her happy, spend time with her regularly, touching her, hand feeding her occasionally. Give her a name. Sing to her.

Make sure she is warm and dry. Have a good roof over the stable to protect her from the rain. Keep the floor in the stable dry with sawdust. Clean out the cow poo regularly.

If the cow is wet and cold, she will use her energy for getting warm again. This means she has less energy for making milk.

If you want meat instead of milk, leave the calf on the cow for a long time, until it has grown big.

If the cow or calf has worms, give her a tablet every 3 months (600/- in Sunga). A small calf should be given 1/3 of a tablet. A bigger calf 1/2 tablet.

If a cow or calf has diarrhea feed it dry food for a few days until it disappears.

We stressed the fact that the increase in milk will not happen overnight. It will take months and sometimes years of hard work to fully realize the rewards. It is a SLOW process, but by follow the steps above, by putting in the work, the rewards will follow.

Our mantra: Love your cow, and she will love you. The more work you put into your cow, the more she will work for you. A happy cow will give your more milk, more calves and more meat.

The results:

After spending a few days finding our way and experimenting with the process, we finally got into our stride.

During the period April 11 to May 1 2013, we held meetings in five villages (Mambo, Tema, Kwemtindi, Masereka and Kukai) and made our presentation before approximately 240 farmers. The meetings were lively affairs, with many questions being asked and some humor present.

We viewed the cows and calves of 125 individual farmers for personal consultations. Invariably, gratitude was expressed for our presence.

We did see some significant improvements in a few cases where we happened by a second time. Stables had been cleaned, green food had replaced brown, water with salt was a twice daily occurrence.

However, as to long-lasting success, only time will tell. This has been a knowledge-based project in which change will only occur if the farmers themselves instigate it. Each farmer has been equally empowered to use this knowledge should she/he so choose.

We believe our message has been, for the most part, enthusiastically received. But, if there is to be a lasting increase in cow welfare and milk supply, the farmers will have to put in the hard work over a long period of time. It is up to them now.

The project, involving individual farmer consultation, will continue under the leadership of Bwana Hoza, one or two days each week for the next six months. (This had been kindly sponsored by Elena Berri of Switzerland)

Project Leader: Julian Carr

Translator extraordinaire, and new Project Leader: Bwana Hoza

MamboViewPoint May 2, 2013

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