

Young People Embrace Opportunities in Agriculture

Dairy farming increases employment opportunities and household incomes in Kisumu County, Kenya.



Photo: Fintrac, Inc.

James Onyuka tends to his dairy cows at his farm in Manyatta, Kisumu County.

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– James Onyuka,
Kisumu County Farmer

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

“I used to think that farming was for the uneducated youth and old retirees, but hey, I am an information technology graduate earning a living from the farm,” explains 33-year-old, James Onyuka, in Kisumu County.

Onyuka first pursued employment in the technology industry by opening a cyber café. However, as access to ‘smart’ phones expanded, his main clientele of tech-savvy youth found it easier and more affordable to access the Internet using smart phones instead of his café.

“I looked at available opportunities and dairy farming came to mind. The members of a farmers group in my area made good income from dairy farming. I sold my cyber café equipment and bought two dairy cows. Milk yield from their zero-grazed cattle contributed significantly to the families’ savings and paying for household and farm expenses,” he said.

Agriculture is the single largest contributor to Kenya’s gross domestic product, yet only a handful of youth tap into the industry’s potential to reduce widespread poverty. Through the Kenya Agricultural Value Chains Enterprises (KAVES) activity, USAID promotes smallholder dairy enterprises in 22 counties to generate wealth and increase economic opportunities for women, youth and other vulnerable populations.

Onyuka, one of 20 members of the Manyatta Farmers Group, attended trainings supported by KAVES on the best dairy farming practices. “It was great to learn about the productivity of different dairy breeds, cross-breeding benefits, fodder production and conservation and milk value addition,” he said.

Onyuka milks 43 liters per day from his two dairy cows. Each liter is sold at 60 Kenya Shillings (KSh). Monthly sales are 77,400 KSh (\$832). “After deducting expenses and money ploughed back to the dairy business, I am left with a profit of 42,000 shillings monthly (\$451),” Onyuka said. “I am never embarrassed to say that I am a farmer. I wouldn’t trade my farming enterprise for a white-collar job!”

Within two years, the cows calved and increased Onyuka’s herd to five. Many young people in Onyuka’s village shied away from agricultural jobs, but now are venturing into activities like dairy farming.

To date, the USAID’s KAVES activity has reached more than 15,000 dairy farmers through 455 farmer groups across 22 counties in Kenya with interventions for increasing productivity and household incomes.

KAVES aims to increase the productivity of 500,000 smallholders.