

CRS F2F Ethiopia

Local dairy farm in Ethiopia sees vast expansion following support from Farmer-to-Farmer

PROJECT LOCATION	Ethiopia
TIMEFRAME	2019-2023
COUNTRY PROJECT	Livestock
HOST	Mohammed Abuna Guto Dairy Farm

PROGRAM STATISTICS

417
Number of assignments conducted

23,838
Number of people directly trained

191
Number of hosts supported



Volunteer Dr. Sintayehu Yigerem during support on dairy farm design and management. *Photo by CRS*

Thanks to its considerable livestock numbers and favorable environment for livestock production, Ethiopia's dairy sector has enormous potential for growth. Studies show that such development can lead to better incomes, greater employment and improved nutrition security. Unsurprisingly, private sector investment in dairy farming, milk processing and input provision has risen in recent years. Despite the fact that the dairy sub-sector continues to be characterized by traditional smallholder farming methodologies, milk production in Ethiopia has increased from 1.5 billion liters to 3 billion annually in the past 30 years. One family who have been at the vanguard of this growth are dairy farmers Amina and Mohammed Abuna Guto.

Fifteen years ago, Mohammed was raising a local breed of cattle, and producing very small amounts of milk that was hard to sell on account of local taboos. Luckily, Mohammed's wife Amina came from a business background and had an eye for growth. Amina suggested that they replace their local cows with improved breeds and look further afield for markets. Mohammed listened to his wife and started to dream big. In 2008 they established the Mohammed Abuna Guto Dairy Farm, initially with just one Holstein Friesian cow on 0.2 hectares of land in Ziway, Oromia. Slowly, the farm began to grow but was still reliant on traditional management systems, such as open grazing and using crop residues as feed. The company saw more significant change in 2020 when the farm was introduced to Farmer-to-Farmer volunteers Dr. Sintayehu Yigerem and David Roberts who advised Mohammed and Amina to start forage production as well as feed and milk processing. They also suggested applying for bank loans and acquiring additional land under lease from the local government. Mohammed and Amina acted on the volunteers' advice. They secured a loan of \$70,000 from a local bank, invested in their business and quickly began to reap the rewards.

By 2022 — just two years after the first volunteer assignment — the Mohammed Abuna Guto Dairy Farm had grown to 71 dairy cattle farmed on nine hectares of land, five of which are set aside for forage production.

The company now produces high-value green forage including alfalfa, corn and elephant grass, mixed with fruits like papaya and banana. They produce a variety of feed formulas, tailored to dairy cattle needs, depending on whether they are calves, heifers, or pregnant or milking cows, and employ software to formulate the feed rations based on animal body weight. The company now produces 225 liters of milk per day and collects a further 600 liters from nearby smallholder farmers that it pasteurizes, packages, and sells at a profit.

A second and third round of F2F assignments were completed in 2022. Volunteers Dr. Alganesh Tola, from the Ethiopian Institute of Agriculture, and David Blomquist, a microbiologist from Minnesota Food Protection Association in the U.S., focused their support on dairy product processing which led immediately to the introduction of new products — pasteurized milk, cheese, butter, and strawberry, mango and date flavored yogurts. The dairy farm then opened Shalo, a restaurant offering yogurt and other milk products to accompany traditional meals. The restaurant serves low-income clientele (e.g., youth, day laborers, civil servants) with prices that are accessible compared to other restaurants. On an average day, Shalo sells 150 liters of yogurt, 50 liters of pasteurized milk and 60 kilos of butter. The restaurant also supports the nearby Sher Ethiopia School with more than two thousand 100-mililiter capsules of milk on a daily basis.

Recently, the local government granted Mohammed Abuna Guto Dairy Farm a stall at a public park in Ziway and the company is planning to open two new shops in nearby Shashemene and Negele Arsi. To effectively promote its products and solidify strong business relations with consumers, two more F2F volunteers teamed up to share their technical expertise with the business. Mr. Mulugeta Yimmer, an expert and consultant in milk product quality management from LM Group in Ethiopia, and Bob Bond, a marketing expert from the U.S., trained dairy staff on product branding and marketing and helped Mohammed and Amina develop a brand and logo.

Through all its business operations along the value chain, Mohammed Abuna Guto Dairy Farm has created employment for 32 people (30% women) and is introducing other farmers in the area to new technologies (e.g., improved breeds, forage seeds) at low or no cost. Mohammed shared his contentment, telling CRS, “My satisfaction lies in my contribution to farming and the livelihood improvements of other smallholder farmers.” He added, “I am enthusiastic, especially after visiting Holland and Kenya, to develop and run a modern, model dairy farm in Ethiopia.”

This year, the Ministry of Agriculture has organized an exchange visit for farmers to learn from Amina and Mohammed’s experiences in integrated forage and dairy farm management. Amina gave up running a boutique business to become the full-time manager of the Shalo restaurant and said, “At first, I struggled with breaking the taboo of selling milk in our community, but I’m happy my husband agreed with me and others also followed us. Now we have set our sights on developing markets for our latest products.”



Corn and alfalfa forage production by Mohammed Abuna Guto Dairy Farm. Photo by Haile Deressa/CRS



Volunteer Dr. Alganesh Tola and Alemitu (dairy lab technician at the Ethiopian Institute of Agriculture) supporting the host on product development. Photo by Assefa



New Shalo branding and logo.