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*Agriculture
Food Security
Livelihoods*

Spotlight Story Winter feed crucial to livestock holders

In Georgia, livestock production represents 60 percent of the total value of agricultural production. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, livestock farming started developing in Georgia and today there are 1 200 000 livestock, out of which 750 000 are cows. In the middle of a protracted economic crisis, compounded by the conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation in August 2008, cows have become the main source of income for farmers.

The livestock of small-scale farmers was severely affected by the conflict. Most of the animals were either killed or their health had deteriorated as they were unable to graze and move around freely. There was no winter feed in stock as thousands of hectares of agricultural and pasture land were either damaged or destroyed by aerial bombing and fighting on the ground.

With the support of the United States Agency for International Development, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has assisted small-scale farmers in Georgia to keep their livestock alive and in good health by distributing concentrate animal feed, treating cattle against endoparasites and installing water troughs throughout 2009. In addition, the farmers have benefitted from specialized training on how to produce silage for their cattle.

Dr Levan Tortladze, PhD, professor in agriculture at Agrarian University of Georgia, was recruited by FAO to spearhead a programme aimed at training other trainers as well as the farmers themselves on how to make silage.

Dr Tortladze explains that each farmer has one or two cows used for personal as well as commercial purposes. During winter, which can become very cold, wheat or maize straw are the main fodders, together with hay and concentrate feeds. As a minimum, it is essential to provide a green fodder supplement to enhance rumen function in bovine animals.

GEORGIA



Farmer in Brotsleti village feeding silage to his cow

Livestock holders learn how to make silage



Training in silage production has increased farmers' ability to feed their livestock now and in the long run

Therefore, Dr Tortladze points out, farmers should develop winter fodder crops as finding enough feed in the winter months to maintain good milk production is always problematic for small-scale farmers with limited production capacity. Many are forced to buy hay and concentrates just to keep their animals alive and the higher prices paid for animal feed in the winter months eats away at any disposable income.

The training on how to make silage was carried out in 15 villages and attended by more than 1 000 farmers who had limited prior knowledge of alternative feeding practices. They received hands-on training as well as copies of training brochures prepared by FAO. Furthermore, the Organization produced a training video on how to make silage that will be broadcast countrywide.

Farmers who are in the second month of feeding silage to their cows have confirmed high milk yields and good livestock health conditions. They have indicated that they intend to make silage throughout the year. However, the biggest hurdle is lack of funds to rent chopping machines for the crops. FAO is therefore planning to procure chopping machines to be installed in the villages in Shida Kartli region where there is no access to pasture land or arable land.

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