

Milk chillers help prevent milk quality deterioration for 3 groups of Trashigang

Dairy farmers not being able to produce hygienic milk is a recurrent problem faced by the dairy processors in particular and livestock sector in general. The concept of clean milk production was almost non-existent among smallholder dairy producers of Trashigang in the past when whatever they produced were locally processed into butter and cheese.

The importance of producing hygienic milk was not realized by the farmers until Kofuko International Private Limited (KIPL) located at Chenari started collecting milk from the farmers of Trashigang Dzongkhag. Since then, an effort to improve milk quality from source and in transit was given a priority with RLDC, Kanglung spearheading a separate program on this.

In order to improve milk quality, robust training on clean milk production was imparted to the smallholder dairy farmers, through CARLEP-IFAD funding, bringing tremendous improvement in terms of bacterial count in milk. The comparison in milk quality, before and after the farmers received training, was evaluated which showed positive result. "The bacterial count in milk before the training was found to be exceeding 500000 cfu/ml but after the training it dropped to as far as 150000 cfu/ml", Said Dairy Technologist Tashi Zangmo from RLDC, Kanglung. The current status of bacterial count in milk supplied to Chenari Dairy Plant ranges from 200000-500000 cfu/ml. Production of clean milk continues to be a major challenge despite of awareness and training of dairy farmers.

However, besides unhygienic milking practices, contamination of raw milk generally occurs from equipment used, transportation without cold chain facilities and storage condition. A farmer having to transport milk from their farm to collection center have to face many hardships. One of the farmers Thinley Dorji from Bikhar said, "In absence of bulk milk chiller, I have to wait for hours until milk transport van arrives for collection. In the process, the milk is being spoiled due to exposure to ambient temperature beside wastage of my time." Sighing briefly, he goes on explaining that, "Installation of chilling machine through fund support from CARLEP-IFAD in our collection centers has helped me a lot. I can directly offload my milk into the chiller and I don't have to wait like before. I could use that opportune time in doing other productive works."

The chilling center at Bikhar-Domkhar also pulls milk from few commercial farms located nearby. Dorji Tshering who is a commercial farmer with 15 numbers of dairy cattle is one of the beneficiaries among others. "I carry 45 liters of milk daily to the chilling center in my Bolero vehicle. I have a ready market and I don't have to bother about product processing and marketing anymore," said Mr. Dorji Tshering of Bikhar village.

Dairy groups of Khapti-Bikhar, Bikhar-Domkhar and Yengang Brangsa received 500 liter capacity chiller each during 2016-2017 with fund support from CARLEP-IFAD through RLDC, Kanglung. Installation of chilling machine, imparting of training on clean milk production and supply of milk cans have created conducive environment for dairy value chain to function.

It's not an unusual sight for someone seeing a milk tanker going up and down every day. A lone milk tanker (owned by KIPL) intrude the narrow valley of Khapti-Bikhar climbing uphill as far as Domkhar collecting fresh milk from the chilling center and then descends down collecting milk form Khapti-Bikhar and Buna until it is finally delivered to KIPL dairy plant located at Chenar- 5 kilometers away from Trashigang town. One can already notice how dairy value chain is starting to take its form in Samkhar geog of Trashigang.