

ECLC Farms: Creating Jobs, Transferring Skills and Alleviating Challenges



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The commencement of integrated and vast agricultural activities in Gerset, Aligidir, Fanko-Rawi and Fanko-Tsum'e, Goluj, Ketai and other areas of Laelai-Gash by Eritrea's Crops and Livestock Corporation (ECLC) has opened employment opportunities, skill transfer, technical assistance and exchange of farm-related experiences to farmers and graduates from colleges and training institutions.

When the farm projects were at their initial stage ten years ago, limited farm activities were carried out by inexperienced workers who gradually acquired skills through practical engagement in the fields.

Ever since 2014, when graduates in agriculture were assigned to the farm project in great numbers, graduates from Hamelmalo College of Agriculture, Adi-Halo and other institutes have been deployed to the farm zone. Currently, the farm project is being run by 1,600 well-trained experts in the field of agriculture and animal science.

The input of the experts who are assigned to work in their fields of study has been substantial in increasing agricultural produce and the number of livestock.

The graduates have been able to develop their competence because of the mentoring of senior agronomists and ample opportunities they were provided to hone their skills in the last five years. The veterinary science graduates have been providing services in all areas of the farm zone including distant areas around Ketai.

Mr. Hailezgi Habte, manager of Southwest Farm Zone in Gash-Barka region, said: “What we do as regards creating employment opportunity for the inhabitants of the different farm areas is quite impressive. The people of the area are mostly nomads and they have never been accustomed to farming. Thus, we have enabled them, particularly the women, to acquire farming skills and inculcated in them the culture of working in the fields.”

A number of women have been able to address their economic challenges by working in the farm fields. The Government has provided the residents of the area ample employment opportunities, and the veteran women who work in the farms have been crucial in influencing their peers to work in the farms and improve their living standards.

Currently, 1,000 individuals, 90% of whom are women, are working in different farms; at times the number reaches 3,000. The launching of the farm project has generally enabled the residents of Fesko, Gulsum, Gerset and Fanko to earn their living with ease. Some of the farm workers have become independent farmers owing to the experiences they acquired while working in the farm fields.

The ECLC has been providing pesticides to farmers in six sub-zones of the Gash-Barka region and plans to give them improved seed in the future. The corporation has also been giving veterinary service in the remotest areas of the region. Agricultural experts have been giving technical support to farmers. All services related to livestock health and agriculture have enabled the farmers to engage more in such activities.

The sub-zones of Shambiko, Molqi, Barentu, Tesenei, Goluj, Haykota and Lalai-Gash have benefited from the freely provided veterinary medicines and pesticides.

Horticulture experts deployed to work in seedlings nursery station setup in Gerset are making a difference in the provision of orange, mango, lemon and other seedlings that have been planted in the farm fields around Fanko-Rawi and Fanko-Tsum'e dams. “We are looking forward to nurturing more seedlings in a bid to meet the demands of farmers,” Mr. Hailezgi said.

All the sub-zones under the Southwest Farm Zone in the region are integrated. Even though the farm areas have their own work divisions, the integration among the different plantations has been instrumental in the sharing of material and human resources. For instance, the livestock in all areas have an easy access to animal feed in such a way that the surplus in one area is shared with another farm area that has a deficit.

Green animal feed such as alfalfa, millet and maize are cultivated in all the farm areas. In times of need, dried animal feed is sent to Halhale.

Natural compost processed for one year has been utilized as fertilizer to prevent degradation of land fertility. The fertility of Adi-Omar Farm, for instance, has been regularly maintained through natural fertilizers and cultivation of commercial crops that are essential in enriching land fertility. To that end, around 500 hectares of sesame was cultivated last year.

The free veterinary medicines, pesticides and technical support from agriculture experts have tremendously alleviated challenges of farmers. The Corporation is always ready to provide the farmers with necessary medicine and other facilities. Since all the farm areas are endowed with abundant water resources, more and more plantation and farm activities can be carried out.

The impact of the farm projects in improving the living standard of the local inhabitants around the farm areas is evident. The ample amount of water in the reservoirs has been utilized for agriculture and livestock.

Herders in the area have been benefiting from the water resources. Natural grazing lands such as those in Ketai have been sources of animal feed for a large number of livestock. Bademit Dam has also been easing the challenges of deficit of water for livestock.

Women and men with no prior experience working in farms have now learned new skills to earn their living. What is more, the people who are living around Gerset, Tesenei, Fanko, Aligidir and other areas who have been working in the farm fields administered by ECLC come from almost all ethnic groups of Eritrea.