

National Dairy Value-chain Conference



By: Sabrina Solomon

On 21st and 22nd of February, a National Dairy Value-chain Conference was held in Asmara under the theme “Ensuring sufficient, affordable and safe milk and its production.” The conference brought together experts from Eritrea and abroad, including Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, Denmark, and India. Following is an interview with some of the participants who have given their thoughts on the conference and Eritrea’s development of the dairy industry.

What is the purpose of the conference, Professor Gerry?



Professor Gerry Boyle, climate and food ambassador of Vita-Ireland

I would say it's to try and look at some of the best practices in respect of dairy production and processing here in Eritrea. Ireland is a small country with a population of 5 million people, and we export to populations of perhaps 45

million people. We've had success in dairy and one of the positive feedbacks of the dairy industry that I hope will be replicated here in Eritrea is that with modest resources it can provide good incomes for farm families. Ireland has evolved from a very small dairy sector to a world leader today. So I think this is a really important conference.



And I want to commend all of the people who've organized the event and Minister Arefaine, in particular, who has visited Ireland and seen how a sector like dairy can be developed. Would you say Eritrea has the potential to reach a level that Ireland has reached in the dairy industry? Of course. It's only a question of getting the proper investment in place. It's expensive and it'll take time. I think public institutions are very important, right from central government, to ensure that the quality of the milk that is produced is of the highest standard in terms of hygiene and the constituents of milk as that enables a higher level of processing and a more profitable level of processing to take place. So provided the investments are in place, the leadership of the central government is very important. Farmers will follow and ensure that they will produce the best cow and best milk for the Kerry Kyd, value chain specialist from South Africa Give us a brief overview of the conference and what you think Eritrea is going to achieve. I have come to the conference to learn more from our colleagues here, in Eritrea, as well as from various countries like Kenya, Uganda and India.

I think one of the most powerful aspects of this conference is the fact that it brings together knowledge from developing countries, where we can see that there is talent, the knowledge, the knowhow and the experience to solve our challenges, and we can use that knowledge to solve some of the really important

challenges in the dairy value chain here, in Eritrea. I think by bringing all of that knowledge together, we can really take the dairy value chain to the next level so that it can play such an important role in diversity, nutrition and wealth and prosperity of Eritreans everywhere. Is there any lesson that Eritrea can learn from this, and are there any tips that you would like to give? I think, for me, one of the factors of the conference and the work they have been doing in Eritrea is just how incredibly complicated the dairy value chain is. And I think that we must not underestimate the significant progress that has been made here, in Eritrea. The processes have made several steps forward and the knowledge institutes here have made great leads forward.

And I think we sit now on the cusp of significant progress on dairy value chain. One of the most important lessons that I think we should take out of it today is because of the complexity, benefit of everyone. What do you think about Eritrea? Well, I have been to Eritrea before, a number of years ago in the pre-Covid19 days, and I really enjoyed my visit here. I am delighted to be back. I suggest that it's important to be positive and dairy is a very good example. If people are positive, anything can be achieved. Just keep this in mind

Dr. Ricarda Mondry, FAO livestock development officer for East Africa. Tell us about the projects you're currently working on in East Africa.



Dr. Ricarda Mondry, FAO livestock development officer for East Africa.

We are supporting nine countries in eastern Africa on any issue of livestock development. We also find that the dairy sector is very important to address the challenges of food security in eastern Africa and the nutrition needs of children, especially those under 5 years old, and pregnant women. We have also found that during the last ten years, African countries have made a lot of investment

on the dairy sector where net production has nearly doubled. A lot of east African countries are investing, with Kenya and Ethiopia currently being the countries with most livestock and highest production. Eritrea is also somewhere in between. We have many projects in all of these countries addressing all the different chains and the value-chain. We hope to support Eritrea, especially in the dairy sector and specifically in health. What does Eritrea need to do to evolve in dairy production? One point obviously is for the dairy farmers as soon as they move to selling products on higher scale: they need to have good quality and quality primary materials. Like all countries in eastern Africa, Eritrea is subject to climate change that can be very challenging in certain years. So it needs to produce food more intensively through irrigation and other innovative approaches. You also need to organize pharmacy together for proper care. I would like to congratulate the Ministry of Agriculture for doing a good job in this conference, which was an excellent occasion for all of us to get to know each other and can help each other a lot.



Kerry Kyd, value chain specialist from South Africa

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What do you think about the organization of the conference?

The organization of the conference is probably one of the most professional events that I've been to in a while. The thing that really struck me is not only the high level of organization but the thoughtfulness that's gone into developing the program and getting the right people at the event. We've seen everything from institutes from around the world; we've seen people who are in business; we had perspectives from the country and beyond; and we had strong participation from all aspects and all stakeholders. So I would really like to commend the organizing team for the amazing work they've done.

I really love being in Asmara; it's my fourth time here. And the thing that I really appreciate is the warmth and generosity of the people here. I think I'm really struck by the resilience of everyone and you can see that everyone is working tougher to a specific purpose and they do it with kindness and fortitude. I think that is something we can learn from Eritrea.

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