



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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USAID Helps Dairy Farmers Fuel Economic Growth in Kenya through Cooperatives

Mary Rono used to fit the mold of the archetypal Kenyan dairy farmer. The 56-year-old retired government social worker gone dairy farmer and full time mother, living in the village of Kibomet in Kenya's Rift Valley, would milk the family's herd of eight cows once a day. If an informal trader happened to pass by, she might sell the milk for a mere 18 shillings (or 22 cents) per liter. This, and the sale of vegetables from her garden, generated her only cash income.

In 2004 that relationship changed and set off a sequence of events that have since transformed her profession and her life. Rono visited a dairy cooperative in Nyala town that was receiving assistance from the now completed USAID/Kenya Dairy Development Program. Rono was introduced to simple, yet affordable techniques to increase her milk yield, such as milking her cows several times a day and producing her own fodder to feed the cows instead of letting them graze.

Thrilled by the improvements, Rono set out to find a better market for her fresh milk. She continued to receive advice from the subsequent USAID Kenya Dairy Sector Competitiveness Program, and she formed a cooperative so she could bulk her milk with other farmers. She was able to purchase two more heifers. In 2009, she started a self-help group with 15 members: Today, she is the chairperson of the 365-member Koitogos Dynamic Cooperative Society.

"We are now bulking more than 1,000 liters of milk per day, and receiving double the price per liter. We have been able to do a lot with the profits we get from the dairy. We are able to contribute to the school fees of our children. We are able to pay our loans with ease," says Rono.

In Kenya, keeping cows has always been a way of life, but not a business. Now an emerging class of entrepreneurs like Rono is transforming the status quo with USAID support, fueling the drought-prone country's dairy sector as an engine of economic growth and food security.

Since it began in mid-2008, the dairy program—implemented with agribusiness giant Land O'Lakes—has assisted more than 319,000 smallholder milk producers, as well as hundreds of processors, retailers and exporters up and down Kenya's dairy value chain.

The result has been startling: an average income boost of \$675 per rural farming family—over \$167 million overall. In a country where the average yearly income is \$509, the extra cash goes far.

This story originally [appeared](#) on the USAID Mission Kenya website.