



## Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

Online Version: <https://www.feedthefuture.gov/article/meet-experts-giving-youth-leg-malawi%E2%80%99s-dairy-sector>

## Meet the Experts: Giving Youth a Leg Up in Malawi's Dairy Sector



MDFA

The Mpoto Dairy Association in northern Malawi will participate in Bettie Kawonga's (far right) project for young dairy entrepreneurs.

Meet Bettie Kawonga, a 2014 Scholar in the [Borlaug Higher Education for Research and Development Program](#), implemented by Michigan State University and supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development under Feed the Future.

A lecturer in dairy science and technology at the Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources Bunda College of Agriculture (LUANAR) in Malawi, Kawonga is earning a PhD in dairy sciences at the University of Kentucky's Department of Animal and Food Sciences. She is also one of four winners of this year's [40 Chances Fellowship](#) at the World Food Prize in Des Moines, Iowa. After she completes her studies, Kawonga will use the \$150,000 from her 40 Chances award to establish a network of Community Business Incubation Centers, which will enable under-employed Malawian youth to become successful entrepreneurs in Malawi's dairy sector.

[Watch a video](#) highlighting Kawonga's work or read on to see what she had to say about increasing opportunities for young people in her country.

**Tell us a little about yourself: How did you become interested in livestock and why did you decide to focus your efforts on promoting employment for young people in Malawi?**

My interest in agriculture dates back to the time when I helped raise chickens and grow vegetables for home consumption in our backyard garden while growing up. With this background it was easy to choose a career in agriculture after completing secondary education.

In 2000, I was one of two students from Bunda College who participated in a World Poultry Science Regional Youth Program in South Africa. Among many other things, I learned there how South Africa's poultry industry developed through engaging both the private sector and youth along the poultry value chain, with youth receiving mentoring to help them become future leaders in the industry. This is the business model I want to promote with the Malawi Young Dairy Entrepreneurs Project (MAYODE).

Studies in Africa, including Malawi, have shown that close to 60 percent of the population are youth, many of whom are unemployed, in part due to a lack of skills. I believe the time has come for us who are working in the livestock sector to

harness the potential of young people by providing necessary leadership and technical skills in the dairy value chain.

**How do Community Business Incubation Centers work? Can you explain the process of skills training and start-up funds for youth in a bit more detail?**

Groups of young people (20 members per group) in rural communities with an interest in dairy will be matched with mentors – accomplished business leaders and animal scientists – and provided with leadership, agribusiness, financial and technical skills in the dairy value chain. The groups will have access to start-up funds from an endowment trust to be created with part of the 40 Chances award.

Each group will be mentored for a period of one year, after which they will be required to mentor another group under the supervision of a mentor. Prospective new groups will access a competitive grant from MAYODE after satisfying set guidelines for the project. The cycle will continue with subsequent groups as a way of propagation and skills transfer at the community level. Each group will have a loan and savings system to inculcate a savings culture among youth and enable members to graduate and start independent dairy enterprises of their choice after two to three years of incubation. The groups will be managed through a Dairy Technology and Business Innovations Hub at Malawi's Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

**What kinds of opportunities can youth in Malawi find in the dairy sector? In your experience, are young people excited about job opportunities in food production?**

There are a number of opportunities along the dairy value chain that young people can be engaged in, including feed manufacturing and production, dairy heifer production, animal health services, artificial insemination services, dairy processing and dairy extension services.

Young people are excited by enterprises that can offer them a regular source of income, and dairy enterprises can provide that kind of opportunity.

**Are there one or two things you think governments, companies, and/or other organizations can do to help make careers in agriculture and food security more attractive to young people?**

Provision of infrastructure such as rural roads, electricity, water and telecommunication should be prioritized by both government and the private sector. Young people are technologically oriented, and access to such facilities should be a priority in order to attract young people to rural and peri-urban agricultural areas.

**What advice do you have for youth who are interested in careers in food and agriculture?**

Science-based subjects such as biology, physics and chemistry will form a good foundation for a career in food and agriculture. Hard work, determination, focus, and having mentors will help shape young people's dreams and aspirations for life. Every young person needs to optimize his or her strengths and be willing to work on their weaknesses to achieve their goals.