

Dairy goats generate wealth

FARM Africa project improves goat productivity in the drylands

BY C O AHUYA



Photo: Abdallah Kassim

In the harsh drylands conditions, the goat is able to browse and survive

FARM-Africa's approach is to use farmer groups as service providers for breed improvement, marketing, lobbying and advocacy, training and extension. The organisation has contributed about 100,000 (mainly crossbred) dairy goats to the key production areas of the drylands. More than a hundred buck stations for cross-breeding with local goats have been set up, with more than 35,000 buck services provided. During the project time, the value of goats has greatly increased from US\$20 to US\$100 currently. The survival rates at weaning are now estimated at 94%. Other benefits that have been realized include increased growth rates, manure production, improved capacity of farmer groups to obtain the right breed for rearing and enhanced access to animal health care by poor farmers.

The success of this programme may be in part due to the fact that a goat-based enterprise requires relatively little start-up financial resources. Fodder trees and shrubs can improve the productivity and incomes from the goat enterprises. Towards this, FARM Africa is collaborating with ICRAF in several projects in Kenya. ■

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There are 9.7 million goats in Kenya's drylands. Over 90% of these goats are indigenous, and contribute 30% of the total red meat consumed in the country. Despite their importance to the livestock industry and the national economy, goats have been largely ignored in research and development programmes.

The advantage of goats lies in the fact that they mature fast, enabling farmers to quickly build-up stocks. They are also known for their ability to do well in harsh conditions such as those prevailing in the arid and semi-arid areas, with water and feed shortages, extreme temperature variability and difficult terrain.

Food and Agricultural Research Management-Africa (FARM-Africa) is an international NGO. It started operations in Kenya in 1987, and has been widely involved in work aimed at developing the smallholder goat industry.