

## Dairy farmers keep abreast of developments

**HANDY SKILLS:**Forty farmers are enriched by the learning experience at a skills upgrade workshop to help them produce more and consistently good quality fresh milk



Whether milking by hand or machine, good hygiene is essential.

Although most have vast farm experience, they lack knowledge of safe practices, quality control and administrative work.

Understanding this, Melaka Dairy Co-operative Bhd, in collaboration with Dutch Lady Malaysia, the Veterinary Services Department and Agriculture Ministry, recently organised the Melaka Dairy Farmers Upgrade Skills workshop.

Held at D'Village Resort in Ayer Keroh, here, the three-day workshop was to gear farmers with a better understanding of safe practices and milking techniques.

The workshop was under Dutch Lady's Dairy Development programme, which aims to develop the local dairy industry by sharing expertise.

Opened by State Exco for Rural Development and Agriculture Datuk Perumal Raju, the workshop was attended by about 40 dairy farmers and dairy co-operatives from Selangor, Perak, Johor and Negri Sembilan.

Dutch Lady Malaysia corporate and regulatory affairs head Rohana Safinah Abdul Hamid said it was the company's corporate social responsibility to share its expertise in technical knowledge with the farmers.

"The programme was initiated in 2008 to increase the local production of fresh milk.

"Many farmers have benefited from participating in the programme as they were able afterwards to increase as well as ensure quality production.

"The volume of production has doubled from 26,000 litres to 50,000 litres per week in the

four years since we started the programme," said Rohana.

The workshop offers dairy farmers advice and counselling and up-to-date information on animal husbandry.

Participants also pick up vital knowledge of milk handling and practical and business skills.

Melaka Dairy Co-operative Bhd chairman Briz Kumar Sukardhanram said it was the cooperative's mission to help by providing value-added services.

"We hope the workshop will enable the farmers to become better producers and businessmen," said Briz.

Veterinary Services Department senior deputy director Dr Siti Salmiyah Tahir said the farmers needed to know how to maximise resources for higher yield.

"Farmers need to be exposed to the technologies that can help them to improve their farm operations, boost production and generate better returns.

"Basically, the aim is to produce more and consistently good quality fresh milk," she said.

It all starts with the cow, of course.

Farmers were introduced to the Cow Signals Diamond theory, which expounds six keys to a healthy cow. They are feed, water, light, air, rest and space -- all of which directly affect the health and therefore, the productivity of the animal.

For practical lessons, the participants visited dairy farms in Alor Gajah and Ayer Molek.

Dairy farmers usually collect fresh milk twice a day to send to the nearest milk collection centre.

To ensure health and hygiene, the milking machine and storage equipment must be kept sanitised. The milkers must have a clean bill of health, clean clothes and clean hands.

Freshly-expressed milk must be immediately stored in a chiller tank at 3oC to prevent bacterial growth.

Alor Gajah dairy farm owner P. Jagannatham, 45, said the programme enriched the farmers' knowledge for quality milk production.

"The Cow Signals Diamond session gave us valuable information on animal-handling and understanding animal welfare,

"We learnt that happy cows produce healthy milk. We are to feed them well and allow them to roam and graze. They must also have enough rest to produce a high volume of milk," he said.

His wife M. Letchumi, 40, who helps at the farm, said: "Two years ago, 20 of our cows died from an unknown disease.

"We realised then that the environment played a big part in the cows' health.

"We lacked knowledge of animal-handling, and although we researched fresh milk production on the Internet and bought books, it was not enough.

"This programme, however, is relevant and comprehensive," she said.

Ayer Molek farm owner Bacha Lal Baboothiram, 57 said the workshop was informative.

"Many years ago, farmers milked with their hands. Technology has given us the milking machine, which makes our job easier.

"But whether milking by hand or machine, good hygiene is essential. " said Bacha Lal, who has been in the field for 30 years.

The last day of the workshop was spent at the Ayer Molek Milk Collection Centre.

It is managed by the Veterinary Services Department and Melaka Dairy Co-operative Bhd, which is responsible for monitoring the quality of and payment for the milk.

The centre processes and tests the milk before dispatching it to the suppliers.

The milk undergoes four tests for taste and smell, level of protein stabilisation, density and fat. Deliveries that are not up to standard are rejected.