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A journey towards integrating dairy

Archana Bhatt, Raveendran and Abdulla Habeeb

While adversity inspired her to start a new initiative, the training and the support she received from external agencies made her dream possible and sustain. Lily Mathews is a case to draw inspiration in converting an adversity into an opportunity. Completing 25 years in dairy farming, she is now a role model to reckon with in the region.

Lilly Mathews, is one among very few women who dared to take up new challenges in their life when the things went down. When her family suffered severe loss in agriculture, she took up an initiative to try her hand in dairy farming as a coping strategy for the loss incurred in pepper farming. Lilly Mathews is a passionate women farmer who is now owner of more than 70 productive cross bred cows and running a successful dairy venture from her home in Mananthavady, Wayanad, Kerala. But this journey was not an easy one to achieve, but she took the challenge and managed the risk involved with setting up her dairy enterprise.

In the past, Lilly and her family was predominantly engaged in the cultivation of black pepper in nine acres of land along with other crops like coconut, coffee, areca nut, cashew nut and vegetables. Their main source of income was through pepper and they used to receive 40 qtl of pepper. Coconut, coffee and areca nut also contributed significantly to their income. But nearly 26 years ago, a sizable portion of the pepper perished owing to diseases like quick wilt and slow wilt and it became very difficult to revive these pepper vines. Currently, they are

still cultivating pepper varieties, mainly Karimunda and Panniyur-I while Wayanadan was completely gone due to disease infection. It was a tough time for the family as they faced immense financial burden since apart from pepper, areca nut also got affected by diseases and couldn't survive well. In these vulnerable times, Lilly Mathews didn't lose hope and with support of her family, decided to start off a dairy venture as a coping strategy. Her parents were traditionally rearing dairy animals so this experience gave her the courage to take up this enterprise.

Dairy initiative

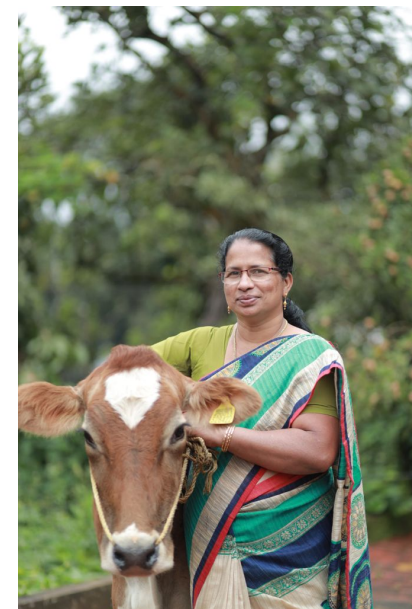
Initially, Lilly Mathews started with a small dairy unit of 15 cross bred cows that she brought from Coimbatore and the rest is history. Her husband, Mr. Mathews was a lecturer in a private college at Mananthavady; later he also joined with her in dairy farming. Due to the disease infection in the pepper crop, they cut down few trees that were used as a support for pepper and started fodder grass cultivation. Even though, she had experience in dairy farming, starting dairy as an enterprise was an entirely new challenge. Lilly attended various trainings to equip herself as a full fledged dairy farmer. She also got support from government departments and other organizations in her journey. In 2008, she received support for 10 cows from the Animal Husbandry Department followed by support for buying the milking machine, planting of fodder grass as well as elaborating the cow shed. Later in 2014, she received training on cattle rearing and development of milk products from Erode Animal Hospital and Veterinary College, Pookode. All these trainings helped her gain more confidence and inspired her to follow her passion in dairy farming.

At present, her farm is home to 70 cross bred cows. Since last 10 years, milking is done through automated milking machines with the help of few workers who are also fairly trained in dairy management by Lilly herself. All the cows are fed with quality feed and good fodder cultivated on her farm along with mixed ration that she herself prepares in definite ratio via various concentrate and feeds. She also shared that in case of any necessity, the officials from Animal Husbandry Department provide her the needed support for immediate medical emergency.

In 2018, Lilly achieved a new milestone. She initiated a Value Addition Unit at her home with a cold storage facility to produce diverse products from milk including curd, ghee, butter, paneer, butter milk, etc. Earlier, she was getting a minimum Rs.35 per liter milk while selling at the Milk Society, but after the value addition unit was installed she got an amount of Rs.55 per liter. This helped her achieve a fairly better income every month through the sale of milk and milk products. Currently, her farm produces around 700 litres of milk per day. She says that minimum 20 liters of milk per cow is essential to run the farm successfully and profitably and below this range can incur losses due to high expenditure. She is marketing milk and milk products across Wayanad and Kannur districts with her own brand "Lillys" through their transport vehicles and two shops. Neighbours and visitors who come to visit the farm can also buy the products directly from the unit. Apart from cattle, she also maintains poultry, flying duck, goose, etc., and planning to rear some goats as well, in near future.

Farm level integration

With the success of her dairy farm, Lilly revived her love for crop farming as well. Apart from coffee, pepper, coconut, etc., she is cultivating various vegetable crops also. Entire farm is solely run organically. Cow dung slurry (Cow dung + cow urine) is collected and utilized as organic fertilizer for the entire farm and bio gas plant is also under progress, to recycle the dung. Cow urine is also used for pest management and sold as per demand. She is planning to start another venture on production of organic fertilizers like Jeevamrutam in coming years. She has now started reviving the pepper she lost in the yesteryears along with expanding her enterprise to value added products.



Lily Mathews, a successful dairy entrepreneur



Cows are fed with quality feed and good fodder cultivated on the farm

As she is ready to celebrate the silver jubilee of her farm next year, she proudly tells that her dream is to increase her farm's milk production to 1000 liters per day by increasing the number of cows to 90. Her advice to the new comers in this field is to initiate the venture at a small scale. And, one should receive proper training and start steadily in achieving their goal. With her success, Lilly Mathews is now a recognized resource person for fellow farmers and students who visit her farm for advice. She has received numerous accolades at national and state level including Dairy Woman of the year at various occasions for her achievements. She also serves as a prominent speaker in Radio Mattoli at Dwarka, Mananthavady to share her knowledge and experiences.

Reminiscing her past, Lilly shares how she turned her life around from experiencing severe debt to getting a good house and a successful business by integrating dairy in her conventional farming system. Her journey is an excellent example of how livestock when integrated into a traditional farming system can change the dynamics of a crop based agricultural system.

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A value addition unit at home to produce diverse products from milk

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