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SUCCESS STORY

Better Feed Equals More Milk

A GDA results in dramatic increase in productivity for Kazakhstani dairy farms

Bolat Alipov, owner of the Alipov-T farm near Almaty, southern Kazakhstan, enjoys the higher yields from his farm.

Photo: USAID

"Without rotational grazing, I would have needed to rent some more land to grow cattle feed. Now, not only I have enough feed for my own herd, but also sell hey to the neighboring farms."

- 34-year old Bolat Alipov, the owner of the *Alipov-T* farm.

As the herd of cows crosses through the gates into the pasture, the animals pick up the pace, kick the heels, and dive into the lush grass. The owner, Bolat Alipov of *Alipov-T* farm 40 kilometers from the former capital of Kazakhstan, Almaty, smiles: "Now I sell the feed to my neighbors, while my cows receive nutrients straight in the field," he says. *Alipov-T* is one of the farms in Kazakhstan that has adopted a rotational grazing method with assistance from USAID and is now enjoying sizeable savings on feed costs, increased milk productivity, and better revenues.

The vast majority of farms in Kazakhstan lack the modern know-how to operate as an effective, and efficient, business. With the fall of the Soviet Union, most of the collective farms have been split into small privately-owned units that cannot afford agricultural specialists, quality inputs or even modern equipment. Farms are operated as they were at the beginning of the last century; both quality and productivity are low. The *Alipov-T* farm, as many others, used to keep its herd of 60 milking cows in a poorly operated barn and used their 200 hectares of land to grow feed - corn, oats, barley, wheat, and hay. The herd, consisting of mixed breeds with below-average genetic potential, was producing an average of 12 liters per cow per day.

To turn the situation around, USAID formed a Global Development Alliance (GDA) with several American companies and have worked with the *Alipov-T* farm to introduce rotational grazing method in early 2008. The GDA helped the farm install modern, electrified fence around 52 hectares of cropland previously used for hay. Within a month the herd was producing an average of 15 liters per cow per day. After GDA partners also suggested a change to the grains being fed to better complement the pasture forage, milk production increased again to 17 liters and is currently maintained at that level. In addition to the increase in the yields of milk, the feed costs have decreased by approximately 3 times. "Now that the cows are grazing in the pasture throughout the day, the cows receive dry feed only in the evenings," says Alipov. "We save on diesel, machinery, and staff time that were formerly required to produce and bring hey and water to the barn, as well as to remove the manure."

Demonstration days and training sessions have already spread the message about the new method far across the country and to neighboring Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Russia. As the GDA ends, the initiative will be continued by the Kazakhstan Scientific Research Institute on Livestock and Forage Production.