

A ROAD TO PROGRESS

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Food processing and related industries in India: scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements and supply chain management

Shareholders of Tirupati-based Shreeja Mahila Milk Producer Company, arguably the world's largest dairy that is exclusively owned by women, are on their way to supply milk to the dairy.

File | Photo Credit: [The Hindu](#)

The achievements of women dairy farmers in contributing to India's 'White Revolution' are perhaps the greatest cause for celebrating the Women's History Month in March. That this has happened despite around a majority of dairy farmers owning only small landholdings — typically households with two to five cows — is also a testament to the success of the dairy cooperatives models that were at the heart of Operation Flood.

The approach made it possible to enhance backward and forward linkages in the dairy value chain, paving the way for freeing small farmers from the clutches of middlemen, and guaranteed minimum procurement price for milk. A study by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) indicates that 93% of women farmers who receive training alongside financial support succeed in their ventures, compared to the 57% success rate of those who receive financial aid alone. Institutionalising such inputs, the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) now organises farmer's orientation programmes across the country, under which women farmers are trained in scientific best practices on animal health, fodder quality, clean milk production, and accounts management.

According to latest data, there are more than 1,90,000 dairy cooperative societies across the country, with approximately 6 million women members. A study conducted on Women Dairy Cooperative Society (WDCS) members across Rajasthan showed that with the income generated through dairying, 31% of the women had converted their mud houses to cement structures, while 39% had constructed concrete sheds for their cattle. Importantly, women-led cooperatives also provide fertile ground for grooming women from rural areas for leadership positions. In many instances, this becomes the first step for women in breaking free from traditional practices.

This was amply demonstrated through the testimonials of women dairy farmers highlighted by the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying on the International Women's Day earlier this month. Among the many stories that stood out, it was heartening to hear the account of Prem Bai from Rajasthan who never had access to education or formal employment but experienced a life transformation after she became a member of the Bhilwara Milk Union. She is now the main breadwinner in her family and recently bought 25 acres of land with the income she earned through dairy farming.

Another major challenge in this sector is information asymmetry among farmers. Statistics indicate that small and marginal farmers have access to only 50-70% of the resources that large and medium farmers have. Once again, the presence of collectives in the form of cooperatives and milk unions plays a significant role in enhancing the knowledge and bargaining power of women.

Recent years have seen the rise of women-led dairy unions and companies. To this end, the NDDB has played a proactive role in setting up women-led producer enterprises like Shreeja Mahila Milk Producer Company, which was started with 24 women and now has more than 90,000 members, with an annual turnover of approximately 450 crore.

Last year, Amul Dairy released a list of 10 women dairy farmers who became millionaires by selling milk to the company. For instance, Navalben Dalsangbhai Chaudhary from Vadgam earned almost 88 lakh by selling 2,21,595 kg of milk in 2019-20, and Malvi Kanuben from Dhanera earned about 74 lakh by selling 2,50,745 kg of milk. Innovation in organisational structures has also spurred consistent growth in this sector.

These testimonials of individual women dairy farmers are all the more remarkable for the fact that many of them have not had a formal education, but through the process of dairying and working with larger collectives, such as milk unions and cooperatives, they have mastered the nuances of finance and marketing.

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To reassure Indian Muslims, the PM needs to state that the govt. will not conduct an exercise like NRC

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