

## **The model farm of Dr. Alem Tesfa: Hein-Willem Leeraar's adventure Ethiopia**

**A special trip for Hein-Willem Leeraar, more than 20 years working as a consultant for agricultural entrepreneurs in Holland and foreign countries. He left for Ethiopia for two weeks to visit a dairy farm in Naqamte, Ethiopia, as a mission for PUM Netherlands Senior Experts. Dutch entrepreneurs are considering to invest in the company in order to change it into a model farm, training center with a processing line. Leeraar wrote a feasibility study.**

### **A research into the potential of an Ethiopian dairy farm? Is that daily business?**

The research is. I have done a lot of work outside of The Netherlands, but Africa is of course very special. I have been there two weeks to make a plan and a credit application for banks. Ethiopia is a very special country. It has never been colonized and has a very pleasurable climate.

### **What are the plans for the dairy farm?**

The company is led by Dr. Alem Tesfa, an Ethiopian veterinarian, Phd degree. After 33 years in Finland she returned to the farm of her parents without husband, children and grandchildren. She wants to establish a model farm which will also function as a trainings center for local farmers and students in agriculture. Besides that she wants to install processing lines for cheese, yoghurt and the pasteurization of milk. Doctor Tesfa established a beautiful company and is a great example of somebody who is investing her money into her country of origin.

### **Is the soil in Ethiopia suitable for tillage and dairy farming?**

There is a huge potential. The soil is fertile, but water is a big problem. Not the quantity, because the amount of rain triples the amount of rain in The Netherlands. The problem is that it falls in gusts of rain on a very uneven landscape. Trying to collect the water, it is very hard. Also electricity is a problem. Too many users and too less supply.

### **Which differences did you see compared to The Netherlands?**

The fourteen people working at the farm are also living there, because otherwise they will come too late regarding the fact that they have to walk. Public transport is almost nonexistent and there is no money for a car. Besides that cows also give birth during the evening and the night! On the farm the usage of alcohol and cigarettes is strictly forbidden. Also the social cohesion is enormous. People care for each other when they are ill. Doctor Tesfa is a moving woman. Her role is bigger than only the role of employer. We can learn a lot from that here in The Netherlands.

### **Was it a challenge?**

I analyzed the situation consulting my knowledge and therefore I also see a lot of things that need to improve. For instance, the cows are kept inside day and night on a concrete floor, whereas in The Netherlands we use straw or rubber mats. It demands a good strategy to discuss these things. You are facing another culture and besides that the entrepreneur is a veterinary doctor herself.

### **Do people consume a lot of dairy products in Ethiopia?**

Most people are member of the Ethiopian-Orthodox Church and are therefore not allowed to eat or drink dairy products for a certain amount of time every year. Therefore, it is important to produce products with a longer shelf life. Per capita the Ethiopians consume around 19 kilograms of dairy a year, whereas the WHO advises a consumption of 175 kilograms per capita. Thus, the market has potential. I also noticed it

myself that is hard to buy milk. I always take my own Brinta on every trip, but even in the hotel it was hard to get milk.

**Did you see something else of the country?**

During the trip from Addis Abeba and Naqamte by car. The farm is located around 330 kilometers to the west of the capital. It takes about 7 hours to cover the distance. This says something about the current state of the roads, but the landscape is beautiful. People are walking constantly alongside the roads: long women and half nomads with cattle. Also beggars, because poverty rates are very high. It was also striking to see that nearly nobody smokes. We were very lucky that during our stay a religious festival took place: Epifanie. In Ethiopia that is the feast of revelation. We saw long processions of people dressed in colorful clothes dancing and making music. That was very special to see.

**Will there be a follow-up?**

Depends on the decision of the investors. If they react positively it is possible that I will go there a second time.