

Dairy prices likely to rise; farmers expect better business in summer

HYDERABAD: Summer is a season of hope and business for the milk vendors around the newly developing settlements in Hyderabad city.

Mahmood Arain, from one such settlement believes that summer was quite an exciting season for milk producers. The demand of milk increases for making a variety of ice creams and many other sweetened frozen foods, which people eat in summer as snacks to beat the extreme heat.

“These items generally are not used at a larger scale in winter. Thus, milk producers, as well as milk vendors enjoy summer as they meet the high demand of this produce during the season,” he added.

Mahmood, being a traditional milk vendor, has 16 years experience of selling milk. He travels door to door twice a day to sell around 120 kilograms (60kg each in the morning and evening). He confided that sometimes the demand was even 80-100kg twice a day.

Like other milk vendors, he remains punctual when it comes to supplying milk daily even on public holidays, to his valued customers, including local ice cream vendors, dahi and lassi (yogurt) selling shops, and those who prepare a variety of sweetened frozen food items.

He shared several stories about the emerging daily challenges he faced as a milk vendor in this business.

“Wheat straw and green grasses are in short supply,” he said, adding that the fodder shortage had increased the problems for the cattle farmers, who were facing huge losses.

He predicted that the increasing cost of fodder would soon impact the prices of milk. “The price of milk may go higher very soon,” he added.

Presently, though wheat harvest has started and fresh wheat straw began arriving in the fodder markets, prices were still as high as Rs500 to Rs600 per maund. “The price of wheat straw will go up to Rs1,000 or more per maund soon. It will affect the milk prices,” Mahmood said.

About the problems faced by milk vendors, he said that even though they bought fresh milk from the cattle farms or commission agents, sometimes it spoiled almost instantly due to the extreme heat, which results in disputes with customers. “We (milk vendors) have to bear this loss,” he lamented.

Looking back, he said 22 years ago his family had a cattle farm with 40 buffaloes, and they supplied milk to vendors of neighbouring settlements in the city.

“We migrated from Nawabshah district almost 24 years ago with animals. We built our homes and cattle farm in the open and discarded area in this flourishing city. The business continued till the area was fully developed. Then the residents started crying out against the environmental impacts of the cattle farms,” he shared.

The farm was shifted in another nearby area, but sadly, could not continue due to the increasing cost of feed and maintenance of animals. “We realised that the business was shrinking, so the younger members of the family started collecting milk from other cattle farms to supply in different areas,” he said, explaining that since then the family had continued the same business, which was going smoothly.

Mahmood is familiar with all the ups and downs of milk production, and also buffalo-raising. According to him, breeding of buffalo mostly starts in the months of October and November. They continue giving milk for eight months. But for business purposes they were useful for four-five months, as after this period the yield begins to fall.

Individual farmers, who have one or two cows or buffaloes in villages, produce five to 10 litres of milk daily. They take their product to nearby tea stalls and local collection points where milk coming from different areas gets accumulated. Even sometimes, milk of sheep and goats goes at similar prices. During random interviews from milk vendors, it was learned that get questioned by customers about the purity of the milk production.

About the trend of using vaccinations supposed to multiply milk production, milk vendors said that some leading farmers experimentally started using Oxytocin injections for the first time for milk production during 2000. At that time, nobody thought of the impacts of this injection on human health.

Earlier, the vendors said that traders had devices to check the transparency of milk in major markets and collection points in both rural and urban areas. It helped catch farmers who used to mix water and powder in milk. Those devices were enough to check the authenticity of milk.

However, they said that no device was being used by the traders to check for any harmful impacts of the vaccines, which farmers use to increase production.

Milk vendors admitted that they faced a lot of suspicion from customers, who felt uncertain of the quality of the dairy supply.

There are 70 cattle farms in the newly established cattle colony in Hyderabad city. Each farm has 300-1,000 cattle heads. Out of these farms, only one farm is of specifically cows, where farmers sell milk to specific consumers. Besides this, there is the older and the largest cattle colony on Tando Mohammad Khan road in the city.

There is a huge network of milk companies and sweet manufacturers, who buy milk from leading cattle farms, but they do not ask milk producers about the use of injections or authenticity of the product.

Despite strict directions by the Supreme Court against the use of Oxytocin injections, cattle farmers continuously use the illegal drug to increase milk production in buffaloes. Despite the Supreme Court ban, the drug is available in the market, though farmers have to now bear the increase in cost.

A large number of farmers in villages near Hyderabad, the second largest city of the province, supply milk by mixing the produce from all the breeds - buffalos, cow, sheep and goats. Many of these village farmers do not use vaccines and supply organic milk to the market, but they get a lower price for their product.

There is a chain of business in dairy farming where cattle farmers get new high-yielding buffaloes from village farmers at a low rent of around Rs8,000-Rs10,000 per month. These commercial farmers keep animals at their farms for five-six months for getting milk, and return the buffaloes when yield falls.

Unaware farmers fail to understand the deteriorated health of their animals and the impact they suffered from the vaccines.

Farmers associated with the dairy sector also point to the use of unhygienic and impure fodder for the cattle, which in the long-run impacts the human health.

Livestock is considered the main source of livelihood in rural areas of Pakistan. Milk and other dairy products are a major source of nutrition for rural as well as urban population.

Prof Ismail Kumbher of Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam pointed out that the government had launched a huge dairy production project in Pakistan aiming to bring white (milk) revolution. But it could not continue due to reasons the authorities know better. He proposes the government to offer incentives to rural farmers to launch small entrepreneurship, with marketing awareness.

“It is the only way out to promote this ignored sector in terms of poor check and monitoring system,” the professor added.

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