

MILK AND MILK PRODUCTS QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN MALAWI



Key Messages

- The 2006 Livestock Policy Document is not comprehensive enough to allow stakeholders in the dairy value chain to isolate actions to improve milk and milk products quality. For instance, the Policy has no specific strategies for control of disease that affect milk quality at farm level.
- In the Livestock Policy (2006), section 3.1.3 there is no attempt to specify minimum milk quality standards at smallholder farmer level.
- The Milk and Milk products Act does not clearly state that Milk shall be sold at a premium although it states indirectly of selling Milk at premium or bonus grade, consequently affecting quality of Milk produced.
- On average the majority of dairy farms were below the desirable levels of farm and cow hygiene and cleanliness as stipulated in the 1972 Milk and Milk Products Act.
- Smallholder farmers are deficient in infrastructure, technical and financial capacity to process and add value to milk to the required standards of MS 21.

INTRODUCTION

In Malawi, processors have reported an average milk rejection rate of 7% at the collection centres, which is an indication of poor milk quality being offered for processing. At Milk Bulking Group (MBG) level, the milk rejection rate from individual dairy farmers is difficult to ascertain due to lack of records but milk rejection has been acknowledged by the MBGs. According to Imani, 2004 the microbial level of raw milk produced in Malawi is generally high and as a result the milk sours quickly, and the premises of many farmers are often unhygienic for milk production as are the cows and the milkers. This policy brief therefore highlights specific gaps pertaining to quality of milk and milk products in Malawi.

2.0 THE POLICY REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The dairy industry in Malawi has policies and regulatory frameworks that would provide an enabling environment for improved quality of dairy products. However, there are a number of gaps such as the Policy not being comprehensive enough to allow isolation of practical strategies for players in the industry, outdated content especially in the Act and lack of enforcement of strategies. A number of recommendations have been suggested which could as well be considered in the current review process underway by Government to incorporate in the Livestock Policy document and Milk and Milk Products Act.

Furthermore the industry is well structured from national to local levels with institutions and structures in place to facilitate and coordinate activities in the dairy sub-sector. Additionally and in relation to milk and dairy products quality, the country has a statutory body, Malawi Bureau of Standards (MBS) responsible for developing and monitoring standards. MBS is active in terms of actualising its mandate from milk bulking centres to consumer level to improve dairy products standardization. The MBS is able to track product standardisation only in the formal market, thus its mode of operation requires farmers or MBGs to be pro-active if they are to benefit from MBS services.



Milk buyer demonstrating various common tests run when buying milk including analyzing milk for chemical composition.

3.0 THE STATUS OF MILK AND MILK PRODUCTS

3.1 Production Level

A good farmer aims at producing good quality raw milk, and as such the practices to be followed must be of high quality and consistent with standards. This study reviewed that dairy farmers scored fairly well (median score of 4) on the hygiene of water for cleaning udder and utensils [66% (21)], udder cleanliness [56% (18)] and non-manure solid waste disposal [50% (16)]. Generally, based on the total hygiene scoring systems, which ranges between 20 and 37, 47% of the farmers were above the minimum desirable score of at-least 29 points. Therefore on average the majority of farms assessed were below the desirable levels of farm and cow hygiene and cleanliness. Critical challenges were observed in terms of manure disposal, hygiene and cleanliness of milking utensil and udder towels. In terms of chemical composition, at animal level the average fat content was 3.8% thus meeting Malawi's raw cow's milk specification for fat content. Thus in view of the hygiene, most of the farms assessed were below the standards that would allow the farms to be certified based on the 1972 Milk and Milk Products Act stipulations.

3.2 Processing Level

Milk produced at smallholder farms is mainly processed by the largest private companies in the Malawi: Suncrest Creameries Ltd, Dairiboard Malawi Ltd, (in the southern region of Malawi) Lilongwe Dairy 2001 Ltd, and MDI and mini-processors such as Blue Bell Creameries located in the Central region of Malawi. Northern region depends on MDFA, which has limited capacity of processing 900 litres of milk per day representing capacity to handle about 25% of the milk produced in the northern region. Low milk volumes from MBGs and poor milk quality in terms of both butterfat quantity and milk density are the key bottlenecks to large processors resulting in 50% capacity utilization and limited dairy products diversification.

All the milk is sold raw to large processors because smallholder farmers are deficient in infrastructure, technical and financial capacity to process and add value to milk to the required standards. MBS requires that any processing plant must pass product and processing standards to be certified. The challenge is that smallholder farmer organisations fail to meet the processing standards specified in MS21: Food and Food Processing Units, Code of Hygienic Conditions.

3.3 Distribution Level

Players within the dairy product distribution chain had a mixed reaction on quality of local dairy products. 50% rated the dairy products produced in locally to be very good against 42% who indicated that the products are just good. Key challenges in the distribution challenge has been observed to be short shelf life of dairy products (high perishability), poor packaging of dairy products with some products not making the expiry date not visible, low consumption of dairy products (currently around 7 litres per capita), and that most of the products being expensive. Due to high prices of dairy products ordinary people do not afford.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the gaps identified, the following specific recommendations were isolated.

1. There is a need fasten the review process of the 2006 Livestock Policy document and Milk and Milk Products Act as they are critical in addressing the existing policy gaps such as specific Milk purchasing mechanism (buying according to Milk butter fat content) which is has proved to be an incentive for dairy producers and yet such clauses are absent in the Act and Policy Document and need to be pursued.
2. There is need for capacity building among the smallholder farmers in the following areas: a) agribusiness (taking dairy farming as a business and clarifying on how the Taxation system works), milking and handling hygiene, overall hygiene/cleanliness practices, and behaviour change. A need is there to facilitate enforceability of the current Milk and Milk Act statutes in part III under the Milk and Milk products regulations within the Act which contain specific stipulations with regard to compliancy to hygiene of a dairy farmer. Farmers' laxity to such stipulations posing a health hazard to Milk consumers.
3. MBGs and stakeholder implementing dairy projects should consider adopting hygiene and cleanliness assessment tool [e.g. Farm and Udder Cleanliness Education Tool (FACET)] to monitor progress on milk quality improvement amongst the dairy farmers.
4. The Government should include specific strategies in the Livestock Policy aiming at reducing milk rejection rates at collection centers and by processors primarily caused by poor postharvest handling and disease. The existing Policy does not include any strategies relating to improving the quality of milk and milk products.
5. There is need to advocate for certification of smallholder dairy farmer farms and MBGs as stipulated in the Milk and Milk Products Acts that would enhance their bargaining power for premiums on milk when selling to processors or other customers.

The views and recommendations in this policy brief do not necessarily reflect those of the individuals or organizations that have kindly contributed to its production. This Policy Brief is intended to contribute to debates on important agricultural policy on Milk and Milk products quality and Standards in Malawi

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