

SUCCESS STORY

Students mobilize, educate community to promote food safety

Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine/Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science at Tribhuvan University



HED photos

Above: Veterinary students from the Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science at Tribhuvan University gather at local centers to share best health practices for animal care.

Below: Tufts University Professor Gretchen Kaufman discusses extension work with Dr. Peetambar Kushwaha of Heifer International in Nepal.



Through an award funded by USAID and managed by Higher Education for Development Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine and the Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science at Tribhuvan University in Nepal are collaborating on the design of a social mobilization curriculum. The curriculum will teach veterinary students how to work with local citizens to improve the care of their animals. “New veterinarians must understand and be able to interact with subsistence farmers to promote food security and food safety,” said Dr. I.P. Dhakal, associate professor of Veterinary Medicine at Tribhuvan. Types of contamination in the local meat products include brucellosis, tuberculosis, and E. coli., as well as antibiotic residues in milk. These diseases spread because of inadequate slaughtering facilities and unsanitary meat handling practices.

As a result of the social mobilization effort undertaken by the veterinary students, health camps are now held to encourage the testing and treatment of farm animals. Heifer International also holds classes for community groups and women in particular, as they are the primary caretakers of the family animals. These classes provide veterinary students opportunities to teach meat, milk, and poultry safety techniques and procedures.

As of March 2009, nearly 200 local women have received training in their villages about dairy health hazards, proper care of animals, safe handling of milk and poultry products, and sanitary butchering techniques. Further, more than 700 animals have been tested for brucellosis and tuberculosis.

An important outcome of this social mobilization effort is a healthier commercial livestock farming enterprise. This positive financial enterprise is persuading some young Nepali men not to travel abroad for employment, but instead to remain at home and raise healthy dairy cows. In March 2009, the Kathmandu Post under the headline “Youths Prefer Farming to Jobs Abroad,” reported this story:

“After an uncertain year, Rau Sharma finally dropped the idea of going aboard for employment. Five months ago, Sharma bought five jersey cows with Rs.90,000 he had accumulated to pay for his Dubai visa. He is now a commercial livestock farmer, who says the profession has started paying off well—far better than his prospective foreign job. He now earns a net profit of Rs. 20,000 a month. He was told he would earn about Rs.19,000 a month had he gotten a job in Dubai. ‘But now my earning is better, and in my own home,’ adds an elated Sharma. Dr. Laxman Ghimire, a veterinary doctor, says, ‘Commercial livestock farming can definitely reduce the percentage of Nepali youths going abroad for employment, but the animals must remain healthy.’ ”