

**THE OFFICIAL OPENING REMARKS OF THE ANNUAL SCIENTIFIC
SYMPOSIUM OF THE ANIMAL PRODUCTION SOCIETY OF KENYA AT
KITALE GOLF CLUB ON 19TH APRIL 2011**

I am pleased to be with you and to officiate at the 2011 Annual Scientific Symposium in this region. I wish to take this opportunity to welcome you to this event that aims at improving livestock entrepreneurship to attain food sufficiency.

This event's theme "Driving livestock entrepreneurship towards attainment of food sufficiency and Kenya Vision 2030" and choice of venue come in handy since this region is known for its agricultural productivity in the country. Dairy production in this area is able to provide enough for processing into various milk products. This area also produces the bulk of our maize and provides plenty of farm by-products to provide feeds to the dairy animals.

The presence of these by-products should help develop ways for farmers to utilize them to improve on the dairy herd productivity. Ways of storage as well as treatment of stover to provide better nutrients to the animals. It is therefore an opportune time that members of your Society address livestock productivity in Kenya, for food sufficiency and entrepreneurship development, and give an overriding focus and concern to sustainability and long term stabilization of livestock production in the areas where this provides a high proportion or is almost the only economic option for livelihood.

In Kenya dairy sub sector contributes about 3.5 % of the GDP. It therefore provides livelihood directly to about 1 million households. Challenges toward production are usually low product prices, high input prices and disease incidences which affect productivity. These factors demotivate the farmers to improve production. With value addition of milk into other products providing better prices it is hoped that farmers will improve on productivity and reduce seasonality of milk production.

The continued challenge of drought calls for renewed efforts to look at indigenous animals that are able to survive after the drought and subsequent disease outbreaks. Though the production of these animals is considered low the animals are able to utilize low quality forages and minimal supply of water to produce. It would be necessary to harness this ability and enhance it through proper breeding programmes. This would improve the production potential and improve animal productivity. Establishment of industries to harness these products would ensure volumes to enable the country produce milk powder that would be utilized in times of drought.

The prolonged droughts have led to loss of livestock which has led to vulnerability of the communities due to loss of livelihoods. It is therefore imperative that ways be looked into to

protect these livelihoods. My ministry was able to buy animals from farmers to avoid massive losses of livestock and provide the farmers with some money to support the families and restock after the drought. However, a more sustainable approach would be appropriate to address sustainability.

My ministry together with other stakeholder and the private sector are exploring opportunities to introduce insurance cover that would assist the farmers to be paid in instances where there is prolonged drought and animal losses. The farmers would pay a small premium for the total number of animals in their herd and using the forage cover from satellite pictures determine when the payments would be done. This would create sustainable ways of addressing the drought challenge in the ASAL areas.

Improving livestock productivity in our production systems is faced by complex and challenging issues. Most of our livestock production systems are small-scale, which up to some level, are an efficient way of production. It has, however, been observed that the level of production per unit livestock and land is not at its maximum, and our livestock have more potential than they are delivering under our smallholder system. However, farming is complex and the objectives of the producer may not always be to maximize production. Instead, it may be to optimize profitability or to underwrite the probable risks. Maximization of production may require increased use of commercial inputs and this poses the challenge of farm liquidity and farm gate price guarantee.

It is, however, possible to increase livestock productivity through new and available technologies, without necessarily increasing the costs and risks. In some of the areas, we are aware that our livestock are not exploited to the full potential. These include: milk production, broiler weight by age to market, egg production, wool, hides and skins.

Available information indicates that while most of our grade dairy cows can produce over 20 liters of milk per day, they are hardly producing 10 liters a day on average. Why then are our smallholder dairy farmers not producing at the highest level? The farmer, as a rational being, will only produce to meet his/ her needs at the minimum risk and in the most rational way. If increasing production means spending more money, which the market is not going to pay back, then there will not be any incentive to do so.

I am, however, aware that to alleviate the drought situation and livestock productivity issues, we not only need to address the management of production resource but also the infrastructure and policy. I note that you intend to address these other issues through your sub-themes of: market, marketing and policies; information and technology transfer; and technology development. It has been stated that the failures in the livestock industry are as a result of non-responsive government policies, which have translated into lack of adequate market infrastructures and other production factors, including inadequate and suitable livestock credit.

As a Ministry we are addressing these issues through such initiatives as: National livestock policy session paper no. 2 of 2008, breeding policy, livestock feeds policy, poultry policy, apiculture and dairy sub-sector policy. In addition, the ministry is currently reviewing the laws which have been non-responsive to the current livestock industry so as to augment development in the sub-sector. To address the issues of market and infrastructure, the ministry will create disease free zones which are flagship project of Vision 2030. This would provide a market for our beef in the European market. It will also improve the infrastructure including developing new ones where necessary and address the issues of frequent outbreak of diseases.

I am therefore looking forward to this symposium's proceedings with full hope that you will examine, in reasonable depth, new ways to improve productivity and marketing of livestock products for the farmers and particularly the smallholder farmers. As a Ministry, our objective remains that of providing necessary contributions to the country's economic growth, poverty reduction, employment creation and contributing to food security through availability of quality and high value livestock products. This objective is even more challenging today when we appreciate the fact that diets of children and a majority of household members is deficient in foods and the associated micro-nutrients of animal source. We take this as a major challenge, in addition to the high cases of people living with HIV/AIDS, factors that slow our progress to achieving increased livestock productivity. We need professionals to provide us with advice.

We are aware that we cannot achieve meaningful progress in development without making use of our professionals and we expect to expand our consultations with you in livestock production.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the organisers of this symposium, those who have contributed in various ways, especially those who funded the symposium and all the participants who spared their time to come and share their ideas, and whose presence will surely contribute to the deliberations and success of this symposium. I wish you fruitful deliberations and I look forward to receiving the symposium's proceedings.

It is now my ardent pleasure to declare the 2011 Animal Production Society of Kenya Annual Scientific Symposium officially open.

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Permanent Secretary

Ministry of Livestock Development