



The Milky Way Program: Transforming Nepal's Dairy Sector



Villagers in Kamalamai, Sindhuli, celebrate the arrival of Korean Holstein Heifers, symbolizing innovation and growth in Nepal's dairy sector. Photo by Heifer International.

The *Milky Way Program* seeks to transform Nepal's dairy sector by significantly improving its productivity, efficiency and business ecosystem — ensuring smallholder farmers directly benefit. This ambitious 10-year program is a joint initiative of the Government of Nepal, the Government of South Korea and Heifer International.

Approximately 65 percent of Nepali households depend on agriculture for their livelihoods and food security, and one half of these households keep at least one dairy animal. However, most cows are not raised for commercial purposes, providing meager quantities of milk — less than a tenth of yields in countries like the U.S. or South Korea.

Confronted by low productivity, underdeveloped dairy markets and weak agricultural support services, most smallholder farmers are unable or unwilling to invest in improving their milk productivity and quality. The *Milky Way Program* addresses these challenges through a systems-level, holistic approach in partnership with public and private stakeholders at the global, national, regional and local levels.

Our Approach

The *Milky Way* Program follows three complementary pathways toward dairy sector transformation to sustainably strengthen the sector, improve smallholder farmers' livelihood prospects and significantly reduce Nepal's dependence on imported milk and other dairy products. The program originated when the Government of Nepal requested Heifer International's assistance in advancing the national agricultural development strategy, which identified dairy as a priority sector for investment and development.

The *Milky Way* Program Results Framework



Improving Cow Productivity: The South Korea Connection

A central element of the program is a gift from South Korea to Nepal of 100 high genetic worth Holstein heifers and seven Holstein and one Jersey bulls which arrived in late 2022 and early 2023. Holstein heifers were placed with smallholder farmers while the donated bulls went to Nepal's National Livestock Breeding Offices (NLBOs) where they are being leveraged to increase the quality and reach of artificial insemination services for dairy farmers across the country to improve the national dairy cattle herd.

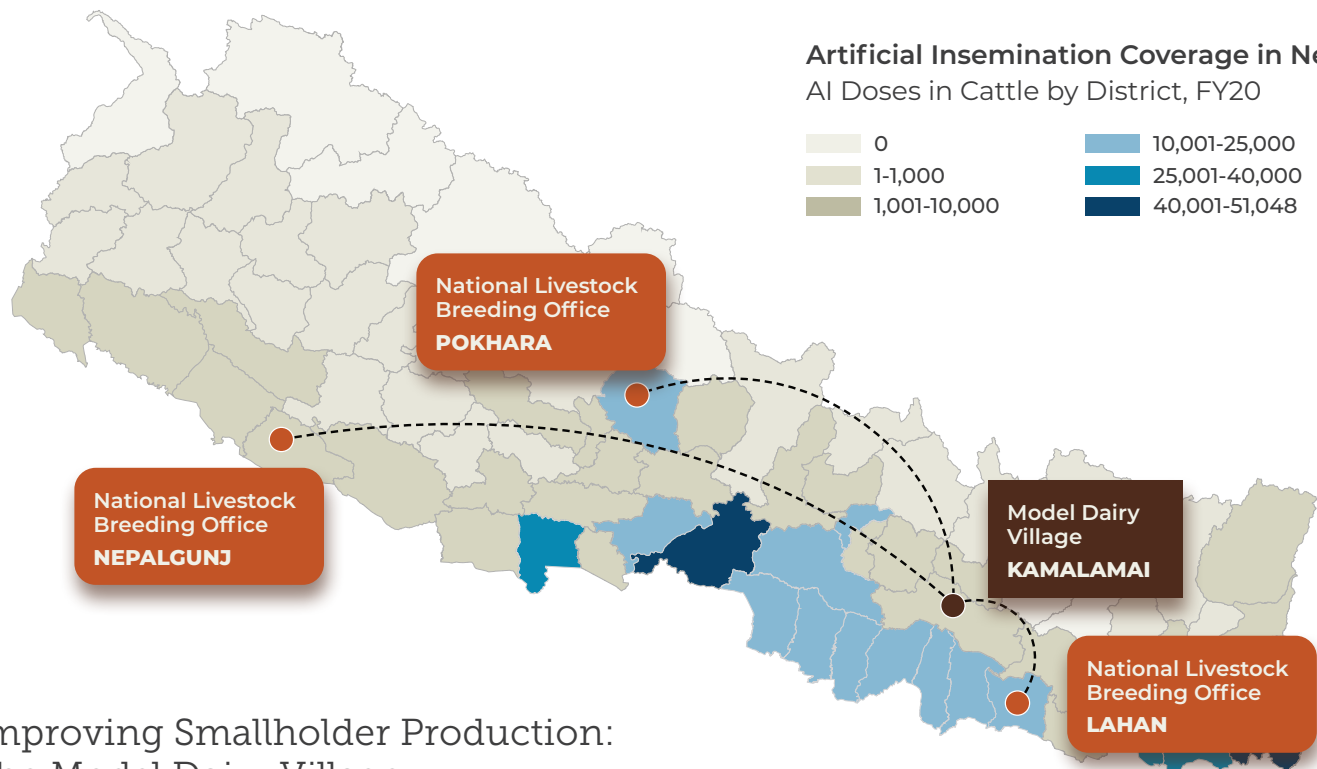
South Korea, now a world leader in dairy productivity, received assistance from Heifer International during and after the Korean War to rehabilitate its depleted livestock resources. Most of the 100 heifers sent to Nepal were donated by South Korean dairy farmers whose families benefited in the past from Heifer International's support while the bulls were a gift from the Government of South Korea.



South Korean Veterinarian, Dr. Junhee Kim, gives a practical lesson on biosecurity and animal health management to members of the Sindhuli Farmer Field School in Nepal. Photo by Heifer International

Artificial Insemination Coverage in Nepal

AI Doses in Cattle by District, FY20



Improving Smallholder Production: The Model Dairy Village

Working with governmental and local partners, Heifer International established a Model Dairy Village in Kamalamai Municipality of Sindhuli District (see map). Before and after receiving Holstein heifers, farmers received intensive training on properly caring for and feeding cows, and the farmers continue to receive veterinary services and other support.

The Model Dairy Village Holstein heifers are inseminated with semen from the Holstein bulls, yielding purebred offspring that continually replenish the supply of bulls for the NLBOs and provide Holstein heifers for more farmers in the community.

The Model Dairy Village aims to be a center of excellence in dairy husbandry, with the goal of replicating positive practices on 500,000 smallholder farms across Nepal.

While the South Korean Holstein heifers require more care and higher-quality feed than farmers are accustomed to providing their local breeds, early indications are that farmers have adapted and the heifers are thriving. Nearly all of the heifers became pregnant, birthing the first calves in February 2024.



Milky Way Program Director Keshav Sah stands alongside Madhav Adhikari, left, and Rukmani Adhikari, right, who received two heifers from South Korea. Photo by Heifer International.

Prioritizing Women Farmers

The *Milky Way* Program is addressing gender barriers in the dairy sector. In the Model Dairy Village, women are leading the care of livestock and establishing women-run self-help groups as well as the Kamalamai Social Entrepreneurs' Women's Dairy Cooperative. The cooperative will evolve into a business hub to facilitate member access to inputs, veterinary care, livestock insurance, financing and more.

Rukmani Adhikari (seen in the photo on page 3) is a farmer in the Model Dairy Village and a board member of the cooperative. She received two Holstein heifers and has attested to the positive influence of the program's support for women in the community. "Before Heifer came, we were very shy, we couldn't even introduce ourselves in meetings," she recalled. "Heifer taught us that you need to come out of yourselves and communicate with visitors. So, we formed self-help groups [and the cooperative]. We now feel empowered and much more confident."

"Our income and earnings ... are these cows. Currently, no one in my house is a job holder. Therefore, our hope and trust are entirely placed in these cows. I have three children to support, and I must focus on their education, marriage and other needs, I don't have any other source but to rely on these cows. This is why I have so much hope for these cows."

— RUKMANI ADHIKARI
Dairy farmer and *Milky Way* participant



Attendees and guests gathered at the Korea-Nepal Model Dairy Village In Kamalamai Municipality, Sindhuli, to cut the ribbon and officially inaugurate the facility on February 13, 2024. From left to right: Deepak Subedi, executive director SIDS Nepal; Dr. Young-Chan Kim, president and chief veterinarian of PAJU Dairy Clinic of Seoul Dairy Cooperative; Dr. Tirtha Raj Regmi, country director of Heifer Nepal; Dr. Rewati Raman Poudel, secretary – Livestock Development, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development; Ambassador Taeyoung Park of the Republic of Korea to Nepal; Mr. Upendra Pokharel, mayor of Kamalamai Municipality; Ms. Haewon Lee, executive director of Heifer Korea; Ms. Neena Joshi, senior vice president of Heifer International; Ms. Yoonhee Chung, deputy director of KOICA Nepal Office; Dr. Umesh Dahal, director general of Department of Livestock Services



To learn more about the *Milky Way* Program, access a detailed report by scanning the QR code.

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