

Ethiopians learning to fight ectoparasites

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia — Millions of Ethiopians earn a living by raising livestock. The country boasts the largest herd population in Africa, with approximately 86 million cattle, sheep and goats raised by rural farmers and herdsman. The country's long-standing livestock tradition has yielded a vibrant leather industry, with hides and skins from the countryside manufactured into semi-processed and finished leather and leather goods sold all over the world. Ethiopia exported 17 million tons of leather and leather products worth \$81 million in 2006, and in the first half of 2007, export value increased 17 percent from the first half of 2006. Next to coffee, the livestock industry is the largest export sector for Ethiopia and is critical to rural farmers.

The industry and the farmers supporting it, however, are under the constant threat of ectoparasites. Known locally as "ekek," ectoparasites ravage up to 90 percent of rural herds in Amhara, which is one of the worst-hit regions.

Other regions suffer infestation rates as high as 70 percent. Infested animals have symptoms including decreased weight and lesions and blemishes. This hurts the value of the animal, directly hitting the farmer's pocketbook, as well as the competitiveness of the country's leather industry.

In 2006, Fintrac's USAID-funded Agribusiness and Trade Expansion Program (ATEP) started helping Amhara's regional government with its ectoparasite treatment campaigns, which focus on four woredas (departments): Gera Medir, Kaya Gebrel, Muzlalo, and Muzmama. The treatment campaigns are a massive effort to reduce infestation by spraying animals and providing medicine baths to control ectoparasites. In the first two campaigns, each lasting three months, infestation rates of a surveyed group plummeted from 90 percent to less than 5 percent. A major factor in this dramatic decline was the decision to increase the number of annual treatments from two to four.

In late 2006, the third campaign added a component to train private farmers to act as community animal health workers (CAHW) in their kebeles (districts). These workers provide ekek treatment for ETB 0.40 per animal. Fintrac provided training and oversight to 87 MoARD veterinarians and animal technicians in the



Photos by Fintrac Inc.

An Ethiopian farmer and a community animal health worker (CAHW) prepare sheep for ectoparasite treatments.



CAHWs wear protective gear when administering treatments.

targeted woredas who, in turn, trained private farmers as CAHWs and supervised the treatments. In addition to Fintrac's technical support and provision of training costs and improved chemical safety gear including overalls, masks, gloves, and sprayers, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations provided \$64,000 to train CAHWs and the Ethiopian Leather Industries Association (ELIA) invested \$42,000 in medicine, equipment and other training expenses.

Animals receiving ectoparasite treatments see improved health and weight increases averaging around 7 kilograms. Because of improved returns at the market from healthier, heavier animals, farmers are willing to pay for the treatment, especially considering that if a farmer has 15 animals and treats them four times a year, the cost is only ETB 24.00 (\$2.65). The return for a farmer far outweighs this cost. Amhara market prices for sheep in poor health range from ETB 130 to 150, while treated animals fetch prices as high as ETB 250. With the increased value, a farmer with 15 animals can earn an extra ETB 100 per animal, or ETB 1,500 (\$165.00). Additional gains come from higher animal birth rates, further driving the demand for CAHW services.

To date, 177 farmers have been trained and equipped as CAHWs, collectively reaching thousands of farmers in the targeted woredas.

"The intervention of the regional government, USAID-ATEP and other stakeholders has reduced the ectoparasite infestation rate," said Mekonen Zemene, an animal health worker in Menz Mama Midir Woreda. "Changes have been observed on the health status and weight of sheep and goats in our woreda, but there remains a lot to be done."

Additional campaigns are currently planned for Tigray, Afar, Oromia, and SNNP regions. In addition to farmer incomes, additional benefits to the leather industry include improved hides and skins quality, which will lead to increased export volumes and dollar values for internationally traded leather goods from Ethiopia.

Fintrac's ATEP program is an aggressive, market-led effort designed to energize Ethiopia's agriculture industry. The project is dramatically improving competitiveness and productivity for thousands of farmers, processors and traders resulting in increased exports, investment, employment, and incomes.

"The intervention of the regional government, USAID-ATEP and other stakeholders has reduced the ectoparasite infestation rate."

— Mekonen Zemene, animal health worker



CAHWs attend a training session in Amhara.



A CAHW keeps track of the treatments and sale transactions.