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SUCCESS STORY

Premium Cheese Creates Opportunities

Cheese plant offers steady income and a quality product



Photo: Tim Bergstrom, Land O'Lakes

Dr. Jendayi Frazer, U.S. Ambassador to South Africa, center, samples premium chèvre produced by Zama Goat Cheese.

Ambassador Frazer was so impressed with the flavor that she requested that the cheese be served at all future official functions.

Mike Sandile, head cheesemaker at South Africa's Zama Goat Cheese, attended a reception hosted by the U.S. Ambassador in November 2004, bringing with him samples of his company's cheese. U.S. Ambassador Jendayi Frazer was so impressed with the flavor that she requested that the cheese be served at future official functions. The Ambassador's head chef added it was one of the best goat cheeses she had tasted and that its quality and texture made it easy to work with and adaptable for numerous recipes.

With support from USAID, Zama Goat Cheese was established in 2003 to give disadvantaged South Africans the opportunity to generate income while producing and marketing a premium chèvre (French for "cheese"). Zama's owners and operators were once day laborers, working in someone else's processing plant. Now they run a successful cheese processing plant that provides jobs for the community and also helps others by purchasing some of the plant's milk requirements from disadvantaged farmers.

Created virtually from scratch, Zama required support developing all areas of its operation. USAID provided technical assistance, networking opportunities and access to equipment and facilities, as well as training in the knowledge and skills needed to successfully manage a cheese production business. A financial management system was developed, and the owners were trained in its use. The financial record keeping system and the budget that was developed provided the basis for a grant from the Eastern Cape Department of Agriculture, enabling the purchase of additional equipment and 127 milking goats. Extensive training was provided in herd management and cheese production.

Zama Goat Cheese now produces and markets more than 550 pounds of cheese every month, providing a profitable and sustainable livelihood for its employees, clients and their families.

Telling Our Story

U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
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