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Dairy Cows Boost Income, Opportunities

A dairy cow changes the life of a poor rural family in Malawi

Can one cow stop deforestation, send children to school, and help open a savings account? It sounds like the start of a riddle, but for Grisham Nyoni, it's a serious question with a real answer: Yes it can. Nyoni and his dairy cow will show you how.



Photo: USAID/Anna Sparks

Grisham Nyoni tells the story of how he acquired his cow outside his home in Lukonkhowe village near Mzuzu, northern Malawi.

“With the milk from my cow, I have milk for my own family and can sell the rest at a profit. I earn enough to send my children to school and open a savings account,” said Grisham Nyoni, a beneficiary of the USAID-sponsored Land O’ Lakes program

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Nyoni used to make a living by chopping down trees from the hills around his house to sell as firewood in the village of Lukonkhowe, in northern Malawi. He never made enough money to feed his family enough, let alone send his children to school. He certainly didn't have enough to put into a savings account or build a house.

Then, he received a dairy cow through the USAID-supported Land O’ Lakes project. The dairy cow changed everything: with the milk from the cow, Nyoni began producing milk for his own family to drink and selling the extra milk at a nice profit. He started

earning enough to send his children to school. When he saw that he still had some money leftover, he opened a savings account at the local bank.

After a while, the account grew and he realized he had made enough money to construct a new house for his family — a house with walls made of bricks and a sheet-iron roof, rather than walls made of mud and a thatched roof. And more importantly, he no longer cuts down trees to sell as firewood.

Land O’ Lakes and USAID have been supporting the development of the Malawian dairy industry with the goal of helping rural families make enough income to meet their basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, and school for their children. As of 2006, over 6,000 farmers have joined Land O’ Lakes dairy cooperatives. As Nyoni would tell you, the results have been remarkable.