



SUCCESS STORY

Veterinarian Dreams about Bigger Cows

Villages band together to carry out common economic initiatives



Photo: Mercy Corps

Farmers are confident that healthier cows are the way to increase the community's prosperity.

“The local economic development councils are a great idea, because we are forced to come together and solve our common problems,” said veterinarian Joldosh Ibragimov.

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Veterinarian Joldosh Ibragimov from Kara Dobo, Kyrgyzstan, doesn't pine for Kyrgyzstan's pre-independence days. But he does fondly recall one thing about the Soviet period: big cows. In the late 1980s, Joldosh and his colleagues at a collective farm engineered meaty, milk-laden cows using artificial insemination. But the farm collapsed when the Soviet Union broke apart, and the genetic stock of the region's cattle has deteriorated steadily since.

Now Joldosh plans to restore cows to their past heft, which he says would significantly raise incomes in a region where rearing cattle is a primary source of household revenue. His idea has been endorsed by a new brand of economic development organization — a local council with representatives of Kara Dobo and six additional communities that meets to plot their common economic development destiny.

With assistance from USAID, the seven local economic development councils work to accelerate economic growth in a region plagued with ethnic and resource conflicts. The project tackles these tensions by grouping Kyrgyzstan's regional centers and villages according to geography and economic interests. Each village elects three members to a regionwide development council, which then identifies and prioritizes their top economic development issues.

The USAID-financed project helps to carry out those projects that address problems common to several communities. Joldosh says his idea of a roving artificial insemination service meets the test. The economic development council put Joldosh's project at the top of its list and asked the partner for funds to purchase equipment and supplies to open an artificial insemination center. To share the costs, the town will donate an old workshop, which the community will renovate, and pick up the salary of an insemination technician.

Once the service is up and running, Joldosh says it will take only a few generations of inseminated cattle for a two-year-old calf to double its current weight of 200 kilograms (440 pounds). Once people see the financial benefits from the bulkier animals, he is confident they will happily pay the 250 som (about \$7) insemination fee that will allow the project to sustain itself.