

# New technology to boost cattle breeds

By CORRESPONDENT

THE use of sexed semen could be the next frontier in efforts by livestock researchers to improve cattle breeds in Kenya.

Dr Josh Odhiambo, an animal breeding researcher with Worldwide Sires East Africa, said sexed semen offered farmers more than 90 per cent surety that the calf would be born a heifer, unlike natural methods where the probability of getting a male calf are almost at 50 per cent.

Speaking during a presentation at this year's Brookside Livestock Breeders Show and Sale at Jamhuri Park, Dr Odhiambo said the challenge for genetic improvement of Kenya's national livestock herd lay in coming up with breeding methods that assured the farmer of heifers that would eventually produce more milk.

"Our dairy farmers are paid on the basis of milk volumes delivered to processors. A farmer would not want his cow to calf down, only to realise the young one was a bull," Dr Odhiambo said.

"With this new technology, a dairy farmer is almost sure of the sex of offspring, many months before it is born. A farmer who gets a heifer, a female calf, is sure of increased productivity, since the heifer itself would one day be in-calf," Dr Odhiambo said.

The use of sexed semen comes hot on the heels of embryo transfer technology, currently being piloted by the Ayrshire Cattle Breeders Society of Kenya at farms in the North and South Rift. "Technology is affording our farmers a greater spectrum of opportunity. Since our dairy farmers are paid as per vol-



**CERTAINTY:** A new born calf. Expert say sexed semen offers farmers more than 90 per cent surety that the calf would be born a heifer. FILE PHOTO

umes of milk delivered to processors, we are looking at embryo transfer technology so that the receiving cow delivers a calf whose parent has traits of high milk yields," Dr Muchemi Kariuki, the chairman of the Ayrshire Cattle Breeders Society, said.

## Worth trying

Critics have however doubted the success rate of sexed semen, with claims abound that conceptions levels were relatively low, compared to artificial insemination (AI) or embryo transfer.

But Dr Odhiambo allayed these fears, saying sexed semen was a technology worth a try in this country. Farmers attending the livestock fair also expressed jitters over the

affordability of both sexed semen and embryo transfer technology; and now want the government to subsidise the cost of adoption of the two methods of breed improvement.

A dairy farmer from Enoosaen, Trans Mara, Edward Parpai, said most farmers in Kenya are smallholders, and the government ought to set aside funding to be used to roll out technology in animal genetic improvement. "As a farmer, I am more interested in a technology that would see me increase my milk yields.

However, government must come in and assist us in funding," Parpai, who sells his milk to Brookside Dairy's Siongiroi cooling station, said.