

EXCITEMENT GALORE AS BROOKSIDE AIRLIFTS FARMERS TO ISRAEL



Kenya's Deputy President William Ruto congratulates Grace Simiyu, one of 20 lucky farmers who won a trip to Israel during the BLBSS, as Brookside Dairy Executive Chairman Mubobo Kenyatta looks on.

When Grace Simiyu strode into Jamhuri Park for the 2013 Brookside Livestock Breeders Show and Sale, she bore a cardinal aim in her mind: getting to witness Kenya's and the region's best in livestock, including the latest trends in dairy husbandry.

Only that the event was laden with an additional premium; that of clinching an all-expenses paid trip to Israel. Like every attendee, she entered her ticket number from the gates— and somewhat never thought about it again.

That afternoon, Grace was visibly elated when her name was belted out from the public address system: she was one of the lucky winners!

A trip to Israel? Such a far away land? Her mind raced as the ushers led her to the podium where the Deputy President, William Ruto and Brookside Dairy executive chairman Muhoho Kenyatta would bequeath her with the winner's acknowledgement letter. It was too good to be true, in her own words, as the Deputy President shook her hand as she received the letter. That was June of the year.

One uncharacteristically chilly October evening, Grace, together with another nineteen beneficiaries, gathered at a hotel in up market Nairobi in readiness for the longest journey of her life yet; to the Middle East nation. The excitement was palpable; the air tickets were ready; and in a short while, they were headed to the airport.

As they went past the final security and immigration procedure, Grace knew the moment had come: she would shortly be airborne to the far-away land to sample the best in dairy, thanks to Brookside.

Once inside the air-bus, and on a dark night punctuated by the airport flood lights, an eerie feeling of fear of heights seized her. An announcement was made that all was clear for taxiing and take-off.

The behemoth of a machine that the plane was put one last kick on the runway before it began a mad climb into the Nairobi airspace. Another twelve hours and they would land at the Ben Gurion International Airport in Tel-Aviv, Israel. Israel's advancement in dairy left the entourage in awe, and the first visit to the Kibbutz Ambar Feed Centre – the country's largest feed mill enterprise. Ambar Feed Centers manufacture and supply T.M.R. (Total Mixed Ration) for all branches of ruminants – dairy cows, dry cows, beef cattle, goats and sheep.

The Kibbutz Gan Shmuel Fish Farm presented another awesome moment, showcasing farming of carp, tilapia and ornamental fish in earth ponds.

But the team's show stopper was to be the Kibbutz Harduf Organic Farm, a cooperative dairy farm in Israel which usually has 300-400 milking cows, producing approximately 57% of the national quota of milk. On a day when the earth lay panting under the scorching heat in Tel Aviv, the twenty farmers marveled at the only large organic farm in Israel; and witnessed compost processing on the farm, special animal welfare and an on-farm feed center.

At the AfiKim Milk Centre, the farmers were exposed to modern milking solutions on the farm, including animal health monitoring.

The Family Excellent Dairy Farm at Moshav Kfar- Vitkin, a robotic milking family farm, offered a rare glimpse into the latest in intensive dairy technology. The farmers also visited a poultry project within a dairy enterprise at the Kibbutz Beerot Yitzchak.

In between these historical encounters, the farmers, who were accompanied by Brookside's Davis Mwangoma and Brenda Denousse, visited several religious sites like Mount Olives and Sea of Galilee.

On return back home, Ms Simiyu, alongside the other beneficiaries, said the visit to Israel had reinforced her belief in dairy farming as a key driver to national economies. "What we witnessed in Israel is perhaps a wake-up call to farmers to invest more in dairy, since it is clearly a profitable enterprise. We are grateful to Brookside Dairy for the trip. It is all too clear that profitability in the industry lies in increased milk production volumes at the farm level," she said.

According to John Gethi, the Brookside Dairy General Manager in charge of milk procurement and extension services, the visit was intended to have the farmers feel challenged and energized towards increased milk production, and also act as role models to their next-door neighbours. "Our aim is to help build the capacity of the farmers to produce more milk by embracing best practice in dairy operations," Gethi said. "We want to help our farmers grow volumes by investing in proper feed management and correct breeding practice," Mr. Gethi said.



A guide welcomes the visiting team to the Kibbutz Organic Dairy Farm, Tel-Aviv.