To my utter joy I was picked by the Guild of Agricultural Journalists to take part in a one week tour with the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists and Agriterra to Uganda to look at Ugandan agriculture. We were to travel from Kampala along the Mbarara road to the West of Uganda looking at projects ranging from drying fruit to milk processing to coffee and tea production. And everywhere I saw goats! Goats being walked along the road by single herders, goats around huts and villages, goats eating vegetable trimmings outside shops and of course goat meat. In fact it soon became clear that goat meat was going to form a big part of our lunch and dinner (and could have been eaten for breakfast if I had wished). It appeared as stew, as curry and at a very popular local restaurant, Lord’s Bar Mbarara, as kebabs (for which you need quite strong teeth!). On a visit to Kakasero Market, a hugely crowded, bustling market near Kampala, I was surprised to find that goat meat was going to form a big part of our lunch and dinner (and could have been eaten for breakfast if I had wished). It appeared as stew, as curry and at a very popular local restaurant, Lord’s Bar Mbarara, as kebabs (for which you need quite strong teeth!). On a visit to Kakasero Market, a hugely crowded, bustling market near Kampala, I was surprised to find that goat meat was going to form a big part of our lunch and dinner (and could have been eaten for breakfast if I had wished). It appeared as stew, as curry and at a very popular local restaurant, Lord’s Bar Mbarara, as kebabs (for which you need quite strong teeth!).

The goat is slaughtered the evening before the market and the meat has to be sold on that day so there is fierce competition between traders. Luckily I had an opportunity to find out all about goats and their position in the Ugandan farming economy at the NARO – the National Agricultural Research Organisation – at Mbarara. It boasted the ‘Foundation and Experimental stock of Indigenous and Boer breeds of goats for multiplication and evaluation’.

Whilst the rest of the group went to look at the herd of dairy cows which included Jersey, Ayrshire, Friesian and Guernsey, I went off to see the goats. They were contained in several large enclosures with a small ratio of males to females. Their housing was raised so they had a shaded area underneath and they really enjoyed going in and out of it and up and down the ramps. The reason for building like this was so that droppings fell through the slats and could be collected underneath and used for fertilising the land. I was to see this collection and reuse of manure time and time again in Uganda where it is regarded as part of the farming process being used for fertiliser and for making biogas and energy. Somehow makes me feel that here in the UK we are rather behind in this!

Farm Manager Noel Bagume introduced me to the goats. The local breed of goat, the Mubende, is a very smart looking black goat that is extremely well adapted to the terrain and a great converter of food. But the more usually seen goat these days is the local breed crossed with a Boer goat. The Mubende change hands at around 150,000 to 200,000 Ugandan shillings (£37 - £50) which is really quite high value. But the Cross breds fetch around 300,000 Ugandan shillings (£73.00) and the Boer is twice that at 600,000 Ugandan Shillings (£148).

Coupled with the price of goat’s meat, the goat is clearly a valuable agricultural animal. Noel also told me he thought that the local breed, the Mubende, is exceptionally disease resistant and has lovely meat.

When I had my Golden Guernseys, we used to eat the male kids at about 16-26 weeks and they were delicious. In fact we were rather naughty and sometimes told dinner guests they were spring lamb. However the goat meat that I had eaten this week was somewhat different. I couldn't help but notice that when I helped myself to the stews and curries, I...
need to sift through the meat a bit to find something appealing to my western eyes – or even recognisable as meat. There seemed to be things in there I had not previously seen. And that the meat seemed to be a little chewy especially the kebabs, something I had also noticed in Kenya. I asked Noel at what age goats were ready for eating? He told me that the non-productive goats would be eaten, the ones that didn’t breed, the old ones and the castrates which would be fully grown. This to me only reflects how much they value their goats in that they don’t eat them until they are full size so can get the most amount of meat from them. A truly unwasteful system. We could learn a lot – but maybe we could share some slow cooked mutton recipes in return!

HOW A GOAT CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Men, boys, goats, women jostle together kicking up rich dust from the red earth as the Ugandan heat beats down on the heaving goat market. Vanessa Champion, Photojournalist accompanied PENHA (Pastoralist and Environmental Network in the Horn of Africa) on expedition with the pastoralists across Uganda and documented their way of life and discovered that there were arising economic and personal challenges for those herders whose traditional way of life and heritage is now threatened by a more sedentary life being urged upon them from the government.

Before the encouragement to settle, traditionally, the men would drive the cattle across the bush, while the women stayed in the huts, taking care of the children, feeding them and looking after their goats which help provide revenue. When the land was challenging as a result of the dry season or maybe tribal threats, they would move. But now, as they are restricted to one piece of land, and are building more “brick” structures, the Pastoralists need to explore different means of supporting their families, and are developing additional economic streams for revenue. This is where PENHA comes in. PENHA is a voice and lobbying arm for Pastoralists in the Horn of Africa, working with nomads from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Kenya, Somaliland and Djibouti. But it is their work in Uganda which I continue to find particularly interesting. PENHA is a voice for these people and continue to work independently and supporting other groups, such as the Ugandan Land Alliance, COPASCO and others helping lobby and advise at policy level.

PENHA also breed goats at Nkoma Farm which I visited. They give pregnant goats to women, who then nurture them on their own or naa rea ina, and they begin to add to their livestock headcount and in turn can start selling the goats for revenue. Simple. I also visited a goat market, proud strong women in bright dresses, herd their goats and strike hard bargains, holding their own among other traders, buying and selling some rather attractive and healthy goats! This is where PENHA has been able to make a huge and direct difference, the cross-breeding and provision of goats have proved themselves invaluable, particularly to the women whose role has always been to raise and foster them, selling them at markets, bringing in capital for additional food and putting their children through education. It also enables them to purchase material for sewing, raffia for weaving into mats and the like, which then adds to their revenue stream. The cross-bred goats (Mubende) were sensitively cross-bred with South African Boer goats which are good for meat. The crosses can handle local conditions, they grow fast, produce plenty of meat with good body weight and produce twice a year with good twinning rates. This means the revenue from these Nkoma farm goats the PENHA women sell are worth more at the market. It’s amazing what a goat can do… Want to help the women goat farmers PENHA support? To find out more, why not sponsor a little monthly Standing Order to support pastoralists and in particular fellow goat farmers and hear more about the outstanding on-the-ground work of PENHA. The PENHA Uganda office is run by Elizabeth Katushabe, herself a pastoralist and a terrific font of all knowledge. Why not drop them a line to ask about how you can help?

Maybe swapping ideas on farming might benefit us all? http://www.penhanetwork.org/
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