

WOMEN DAIRY PRODUCERS IN COLOMBIA

Women and dairy sector enterprises leverage private and public sector investment at scale

Alpina is a Latin American multinational dairy processing company with activities in the USA. In 2009, Oxfam made a commitment to innovation through an agreement with the company's foundation, Fundación Alpina (FA), in a pilot project in Valle del Cauca. With the foundation, Oxfam jointly supported four smallholder cooperatives with almost 200 members from rural and indigenous communities, to prove that smallholders could be commercial suppliers. Three micro-dairies were funded by a 'soft' loan through a government bank (Banco Agrario). Further support around group formation, management and animal husbandry were provided by Oxfam and FA.

Historically, providers of training and technical assistance in Colombia have been reluctant to focus training on women, who were invisible and unrecognized as farmers in supply chains and in traditional communities. Oxfam and FA commissioned a study which demonstrated that women handled up to 72 per cent of milk production and were responsible for cleaning milking utensils on farms supplying milk. Oxfam and FA agreed to invest in hygiene training, formally recognizing women's roles in the value chain, and invited technical assistance providers to do the same. Technical advice on business plans, training and organizational strengthening was also provided by Oxfam and FA to consolidate the women producers' business ideas.

Workshops were organized on women's leadership and on women's rights, including awareness-raising about domestic violence. With Oxfam, women members did a time-use assessment of work hours, finding that on average they spent eight hours per week on enterprise work, 43 hours on household care work and 25 hours on subsistence agriculture. These findings led to proposals for new washing facilities and collective childcare arrangements, to allow women more time to grow their new agricultural input businesses.

Three of the four cooperatives were successful, and a further two cooperatives have joined the cluster. Following this success, FA has committed to roll out further micro-dairies through Alpina's supply chain in eight municipalities, while the regional government has budgeted \$14m to support their formation.

This leveraging of the project at scale is a significant achievement. In the original

communities, the incomes of small-scale producers increased on average by 15 per cent due to improved productivity and quality, and increased margin as producer-owned storage centres bypass intermediaries. Women have been economically and socially empowered as a result. There has been a shift in the company's understanding and focus on women as key actors in the dairy sector, and the status of women in cooperatives and communities has been transformed.

Lastly, through the support of Oxfam and Fundación Alpina, smallholder farmers have accessed credit worth a total of \$229,000 from Banco Agrario. This has led to an unforeseen opportunity to highlight the barriers that small herders face in accessing formal credit and to advocate for changes in Colombia's domestic credit policy for small agricultural enterprises.

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