Dr Kimutai Maritim, the acting managing director of KDB, and the ILRI Director-General, Prof Appolinaire Djikeng, signing the MoU at the ILRI offices in Nairobi.. PHOTO CREDIT: ILRI

Kenya Dairy Board, ILRI partner to unlock value for smallholders

By Murimi Gitari

The Kenya Dairy Board (KDB) and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to drive innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability across the country's dairy value chain.

The agreement, signed in Nairobi, seeks to leverage ILRI's cutting-edge research in animal health, genetics, and feed systems and KDB's regulatory oversight and policy leadership, to unlock new opportunities for smallholder farmers, processors, and consumers.

"This MoU strengthens our ability to deliver on our promise to regulate, promote, and develop Kenya's dairy industry with innovation, integrity, and impact," said Dr Kimutai Maritim, the acting managing director of KDB.

Kenya's dairy sector is the largest in East Africa, producing over 5.3 billion litres annually and contributing 4.5 percent to the national GDP. With per capita milk consumption at 92 litres—among the highest in Africa—the sector is both a nutritional cornerstone and a vital economic engine. More than half of Kenya's milk is distributed through informal channels, which, while essential to livelihoods, poses challenges in safety and quality assurance.

ILRI Director-General Appolinaire Djikeng said that the partnership goes beyond production goals to address climate resilience and genetic innovation.

"We must ensure the dairy sector is sustainable in the face of climate

A vendor fills up a bottle with milk for sale in the informal market. PHOTO CREDIT: ILRI

change. In regions facing feed stress and disease outbreaks, genetic improvement is key to building resilient production systems," Dr Djikeng said.

"Together, this partnership can bridge critical gaps, strengthen the dairy value chain, and scale innovations that enhance productivity and resilience among smallholder farmers."

He also highlighted the importance of capacity building—not just within ILRI and KDB, but across the broader ecosystem.

"We're committed to training not only our teams but also engaging stakeholders across the sector. The ultimate goal is to ensure farmers can generate income sustainably."

The MoU builds on the success of the MoreMilk 2 project—a KSh200 million initiative funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. Led by KDB and ILRI, MoreMilk 2 has been instrumental in improving milk safety in informal markets, supporting small-scale vendors, especially women and youth, and enhancing public health. The project, being implemented in Nakuru, Nyandarua, and Uasin Gishu counties, offers training in safe milk handling, business skills, and regulatory compliance.

Kenya's National Dairy Master Plan projects a doubling of milk consumption by 2030, requiring production to surge from 8 billion litres to over 18 billion litres annually. The KDB-ILRI partnership is expected to play a pivotal role in meeting this goal while ensuring that growth is inclusive and evidence-driven.

Dr Maritim said that the MoreMilk 2 project is a prime example of how KDB and ILRI can work together to deliver on their shared mandate to regulate, promote, and develop the dairy industry. The MoU, he said, formalises years of collaboration and provides a framework to strengthen production, processing, safety, and consumer awareness

Dr Maritim emphasised that the strategic focus is on increasing milk production, enhancing value addition, and transitioning the informal dairy sector into a more formalized system. This shift is expected to improve access to safe, high-quality milk for consumers while creating more structured opportunities for vendors and processors. Formalisation will also strengthen regulatory oversight, ensuring that milk meets national safety and quality standards.

"To meet Kenya's ambitious goal of doubling milk production, we are also leveraging genetic improvements in dairy cattle. A key intervention is the subsidisation of high-quality semen, including sexed semen, which allows farmers to selectively breed female calves that are more productive for milk. Previously priced at KSh6,000 per dose, sexed semen is now available at a subsidised rate of KSh1,000, making it significantly more accessible to smallholder farmers," Dr Maritim said.