KENYA MEAT EXPO
A Sizzling Experience

4TH EDITION OF THE KENYA MEAT EXPO AND CONFERENCE

Theme: 'Driving Sustainable Growth Across the Meat Value Chain'

What experts are prescribing to strengthen livestock industry

With rising domestic demand and billion-shilling export potential within reach, the opportunity, and the pressure, to modernise has never been greater



From Lef: RECONCILE Executive Director Peter Otieno; National Livestock Development and Promotion Services chairman Mohammed Elmi; Deputy Director of Livestock Production at the State Department for Livestock Evans Makokha, and APMD-AU-IBAR Private Sector Engagement Expert Mohammed Eidle, during a panel discussion at the Kenya Meat Expo 2025 on August 6, 2025. Picture: Dennis Onsongo

The livestock industry is approaching a pivotal moment. Long defined by informal markets, climatic shocks, and subsistence-level production, the sector must now pivot toward structure, sustainability and scale.

With rising domestic demand and billion-shilling export potential within reach, the opportunity, and the pressure, to modernise has never been greater.

This call for transformation echoed throughout the 2025 Kenya Meat Expo, held on August 6-8, where policy experts, pastoral representatives, private sector leaders, and livestock advocates gathered under the theme, ***"Driving Sustainable Growth Across the Meat Value Chain"***.

From drought-proofing systems to strengthening co-operatives and ensuring traceability, the message was clear. The meat value chain must evolve rapidly or risk being left behind.

The opening salvo came from Hon Mohamed Elmi, a seasoned development expert and politician, who underscored the critical role of grassroots livestock co-operatives in driving sector transformation. "Our pastoralists and farmers must begin to form primary co-operatives, like in other sectors, so they can access inputs, organise marketing, and ensure traceability," he said.

In an industry dominated by informal trade and middlemen, Elmi's call was a reminder that organisation is not just about fairness. It is foundational to market access, food safety, and long-term growth. Without primary co-operatives to anchor pastoral communities, investments in veterinary care, feed, certification, and infrastructure struggle to take root.

Currently, the livestock trade is worryingly informal. "Anyone can come in with a tourist visa and start buying goats and camels. Some don't even pay our people," Elmi lamented.

A co-operative-based model, he said, could solve this by formalising the chain, boosting producer incomes, and protecting animals from being sold off indiscriminately or exported without due process.

The dream is to create a digital pastoralist ID card system so that whenever herders are moving across counties or borders, their identity and livestock ownership are recognised. "Even if they are nomadic, they should have access to water and fodder based on registered entitlements," Elmi added.

Evans Makokha, representing the State Department for Livestock and the Animal Production Society of Kenya, dropped a staggering statistic: Kenya currently faces a 60 percent deficit in livestock feed. "We only produce enough to feed 40 percent of our livestock. That has to change," he stressed.

The solutions are local and immediate. "We need to start producing fodder through community groups and co-operatives at the village level. This feed must then be conserved for drought periods," Makokha said. He advocated for innovation in alternative protein sources such as black soldier fly larvae, Azolla (a fast-growing aquatic plant), and high-nutrient feed blocks that could bridge the nutritional gap during dry spells.

In parallel, Makokha emphasised circular economy models using organic waste to produce animal feed, and creating a national fodder bank, akin to the National Cereals and Produce Board, to stabilise availability and pricing during crises.

Peter Otieno, from Resource Conflict Institute (RECONCILE), a peacebuilding and land rights NGO, outlined how rangeland conflicts remain a major bottleneck in livestock productivity. "We must stop romanticising new policies. The National Land Policy and Community Land Act already exist. The issue is implementation," Otieno said.

With over 88 percent of Kenya's livestock sourced from pastoral and agro-pastoral systems (according to a joint study by Strathmore University and IGAD), securing communal grazing rights is critical. Otieno noted that while ranches produce only one percent of the country's livestock, they have structured systems that enhance health, productivity, and traceability.

To bridge this gap, he advocated for full operationalisation of the Community Land Act, participatory rangeland management, and moratoriums on settlement in grazing zones. "Pastoralism is a production system, not a relic. Let's treat it with the policy and investment seriousness it deserves," he stressed.

From slaughterhouses to cold chains, the private sector's role is both vital and underleveraged. Representing the African Union's ABMD (African Pastoral Market Development) platform, Mohamed Eidle emphasised that only 10 percent of agricultural investments since 2015 have gone to the livestock sector despite its vast contribution to GDP and rural employment.

"The private sector is crucial in investing in slaughter infrastructure, feedlots, cold chains, and even aggregation centres," Eidle said. But several barriers persist, including weak return-on-investment data, poor policy enforcement, and lack of bankable business models.

To attract more private players, ABMD is pushing for public-private partnerships and robust data ecosystems. "No one wants to invest without knowing what returns they'll get. We are working with member states to provide this data, while facilitating cross-border trade under the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)," Eidle said.

Traceability emerged as a central pillar of Kenya's meat export ambitions. "We want to export meat that is traceable. That means knowing the full history of the animal, from birth to slaughter," Makokha emphasised.

Part of the strategy includes feedlots to serve both as fattening centres and holding areas for disease screening, quarantine, and identification. "Once you remove drought as a threat, you're left with animals that can be marketed domestically or exported," Elmi said. This calls for structured systems where investors know exactly what kind of livestock they're buying, how they were raised, and their health status.

As the session wrapped up, the speakers aligned on one common vision: The meat value chain must be treated as a system. "Strengthen the resilience of producers: Make this a global conversation, not just a national one," Peter Otieno urged.

Eidle echoed this, highlighting the need for enabling environments, regulatory clarity, and consistent dialogue between the private sector and government.

For Elmi, the dream is not utopian. "Livestock is the most profitable venture in ASAL areas. We've just failed to organise it. Give a herder Ksh300,000 and a co-operative model, and they'll thrive more than a smallholder on rich land," he said.

The 2025 Kenya Meat Expo did not just spotlight the problems, but also practical, scalable solutions. From formalising grazing rights to building fodder banks, attracting private investment, and implementing existing land laws, the future of the livestock industry hinges on one thing: Execution.

If Kenya can bridge the gap between its resilient pastoral roots and a traceable, export-ready meat system, it won't just feed itself but the entire East African region, and do so profitably.

By Pauline Kairu

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