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Nourishing Livestock, Enriching Lives:
AWARFA-Zimbabwe's Sustainable Fodder Initiative

Preamble

The African Women in Rural Farming Association Network (AWARFA-N) Zimbabwe chapter is spearheading a transformative lucerne production project aimed at addressing Zimbabwe's fodder shortage and empower women in agriculture-based businesses. With a growing national cattle herd of approximately 6 million, the demand for high-quality forage is substantial. This initiative focuses on cultivating lucerne, a premium forage crop known for its high protein content and digestibility, to support the livestock sector. This project intends to empower 100 women farmers in the initial phase, with plans to expand to 1,000 women farmers, which aims to mitigate drought-related losses and enhance livelihoods through fodder sales. The project aims to maintain high-quality lucerne production, adopt best farming practices and ensuring proper storage. In addition, this project seeks to make a significant contribution to improved animal productivity, enhanced food security, and increased farm incomes across the country. AWARFA collaborates with organizations such as the African Union-Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) and relevant government ministries to provide technical support and advocate for women's access to land and resources. The lucerne will be processed into bales and pellets to cater to various livestock needs. This project strategically integrates women into the livestock production value chain, and enhances greater empowerment and economic independence.

Key Terms: *Zimbabwe, Women in feed and fodder production; Lucerne farming and women's economic empowerment; Women-led sustainable feed and fodder markets; Gender-inclusive economic opportunities in livestock sector; Climate resilience and women's role in feed and fodder farming*

Cultivating Lucerne, Empowering Women, and Transforming Livestock Farming

AWARFA-N Zimbabwe is an organization dedicated to empowering women in agriculture. With a focus on the livestock sector, this organization aims to bridge the economic gap between genders and enhance the participation of women in the livestock value chain. AWARFA-N Zimbabwe is affiliated to African Union-Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR) and advocates for sustainable and growth-oriented agriculture.

Addressing Fodder Shortages with Lucerne Production

The AWARFA-N Zimbabwe project centres around the production of lucerne, a premium forage crop. Lucerne, often called the "queen of forage crops," is valued for its high protein content, digestibility, and ability to fix atmospheric nitrogen, reducing the need for fertilizers. Lucerne cultivation helps prevent soil erosion due to its deep roots. Zimbabwe's growing livestock sector, with a national cattle herd of approximately 6 million, faces persistent fodder shortages, especially during lean seasons. Lucerne production addresses this critical need, and ensures a consistent supply of nutritious feed for livestock.

Strategic Objectives and Growth

AWARFA-Zimbabwe has set clear goals to drive the project's growth. To successfully launch Lucerne production, the project will secure all required resources, including funds and seeds. The project will prepare land and install an irrigation system for efficient cultivation. Contract farming agreements with livestock farmers will be established. High-quality lucerne will be produced to supply a significant portion of the market. The cultivation area will be expanded and more rural women will be recruited into the project. The project plans to expand the cultivation area, recruit and train rural women in best practices, and establish a sustainable production system. Sales growth will be achieved by expanding market share through contract farming agreements and increased production.

Target Market and Marketing Strategy

AWARFA-N Zimbabwe is focused on supplying lucerne to the dairy, beef, horse, and small animal farming industries. To secure a consistent market, AWARFA-N Zimbabwe is prioritizing the establishment of contract farming agreements with livestock farmers and feed houses. The goal is to supply 10% of the dairy and horse market sectors.

The dairy market will be supplied with lucerne particularly during the lean season. For beef farmers, AWARFA-N Zimbabwe will focus on raising awareness, especially among subsistence farmers, about the advantages of supplementing feed with lucerne. The horse farming sector will be targeted with high-quality lucerne. AWARFA-N Zimbabwe also intends to supply lucerne in pellet form to farmers raising small animals such as sheep, goats, and free-range chickens.

Production and Revenue Model

Lucerne will be harvested year-round and processed into bales for storage and sale. Additionally, lucerne will be pelletized to cater to poultry and goat farmers. Revenue will be generated from the sale of lucerne hay bales. For example, the revenue for selling 15kg lucerne hay bales per hectare

with 8 cuts per year in Zimbabwe at $12 per bale would be $7,968 per hectare per year.

Empowering Women in Agriculture

AWARFA-N Zimbabwe aims to empower women farmers by providing them with the resources and training needed to succeed in lucerne production. Women can better feed their livestock, mitigate drought-related losses, and improve their livelihoods through income generated from fodder sales, by participating in this project. The project aims to empower 100 women farmers initially, with the goal of expanding to 1,000 women farmers.

Overcoming Competition and Ensuring Success

While there is limited direct competition in lucerne production, AWARFA-N Zimbabwe faces indirect competition from crop residues like maize stover, silage, and feed houses. Key success factors for the project include: a reliable irrigation system to ensure optimum yield, sufficient funding to ensure all inputs are available, good storage facilities to reduce post-harvest losses, and knowledge of good agricultural practices. To mitigate risks such as theft, veld fires, and climate change, AWARFA-N Zimbabwe has implemented various measures, including fencing, insurance, fire prevention measures, and irrigation systems.

Financial Projections and Funding

The project requires initial funding for capital equipment, agro-chemicals, seeds, and fertilizers. AWARFA-N Zimbabwe is exploring various funding options, including financial institutions, investors, crowdfunding, grants, and venture capitalists. The organization will consider financial institutions such as FBC Bank, Ecobank, AFC Bank, and POSB.

Project Impact

The AWARFA-Zimbabwe lucerne production project is expected to have a significant impact: For instance, participating farmers will benefit from lower livestock production costs by using lucerne as a high-quality feed source. Further, the project will address fodder shortages and improve livestock survival rates. Participating farmers will generate increased earnings, and improve their standard of living. Farmers will transition from solely animal rearing to active participation in the feed and fodder production value chain. The project will contribute to economic growth, food security, and improved household income.

Abbreviations

- AWARFA: African Women in Rural Farming Association
- AU-IBAR: African Union-Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources
- ha: Hectare
- iNGOs: International Non-Governmental Organizations
- NALDA: National Agricultural Land Development Authority
- USD: United States Dollar