



Timor-Leste's resilient pig farmers

Pigs are considered a store of wealth and serve important social and economic needs in Timor Leste. A 2019 census shows that an estimated 81 per cent of farming households in Timor-Leste, or 54 per cent of all households, reared a total of more than 450,000 pigs. Despite the importance of pigs, the sector faces several challenges, including limited productive pig breeds and piglets, lack of commercial feed, and the need for more information on good rearing practices and animal health. In 2019, African Swine Fever, a highly contagious pig disease with no vaccine or treatment, wreaked havoc in the country. It is estimated that the diseases wiped out half of Timor-Leste's pig population.

Joana de Sá has raised pigs all her life. While also working as a gardener at a hotel in Baucau, she would usually raise a few local pigs and practised traditional pig rearing: she never cleaned the pig pen and spent up to three hours each day cooking feed. When the pigs bred, she would only get between five to eight piglets per cycle. It would take her up to 12 months to raise the piglets before selling them for approximately USD60 (AUD90) each. For such laborious work, Joana, who is a widow, earned little—not enough to support her family. Joana's story is not unique. Instead, hers is a common story of pig farmers in Timor-Leste.

Like many other pig farmers, Joana was not spared from the devastation of ASF; she lost all her pigs. Also like the other pig farmers, Joana was resilient. She wanted to start pig

farming again but understood that she needed to improve and was eager to learn. She attended her first training session on pig farming held by Casa Agricultor, a pig feed retailer supported by MDF, in 2019. Equipped with the knowledge she received from Casa Agricultor and the ASF prevention campaign conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and MDF in 2020, Joana re-started her pig farm. She bought two piglets of mixed breed and commercial complete pig feed from one of Casa Agricultor's demo plot farmers, who had become a small-scale pig breeder and feed retailer. She implemented better biosecurity practices at her farm, cleaning the pen thrice daily and feeding her pigs more nutritious and complete feed. Within a year, her sow gave birth to ten piglets, and she sold them for USD150 (AUD224) per piglet.



I only made USD1,388 (AUD2,075) a year from my salary as a gardener. However, I can now make USD1,500 (AUD2,243) within six months of selling piglets. I can support my family and keep something from this money to purchase commercial feed and restock.

Joana de Sá,
Pig farmer



Commercial feed increases pig health—but also brings inclusive gains

Easier feeding practices are particularly beneficial to women. While both men and women participate in pig rearing, women play a bigger role in preparing and cooking feed, contributing to 'time poverty.' By using commercial complete feed, women save the many hours needed for feed preparation and can utilise the time for other income-generating activities such as feeding cattle and harvesting other crops, as well as leisure activities. Joana found that feeding her pigs with complete commercial feed had not only resulted in higher pig productivity and income but also saved her significant time. She now only needed a few minutes to feed her pigs and could spend more time with her family as well as on her farm. She told MDF she even used the time to help her friend bake a cake!

The availability of commercial complete feed also makes pig feeding easier for people with disabilities, such as Maria Belo, another pig farmer. Maria lost her right arm below the elbow due to an accident, restricting her movement. She had to do much of the family's pig rearing work herself, as her children work abroad. With complete feed, Maria does not have to spend hours cooking pig feed anymore.



Developing a thriving, increasingly commercial system

Joana and Maria are not the only pig farmers who have benefited from MDF's interventions in the pig sector. As of the end of 2022, over 200 farmers had benefited from MDF-supported pig feed interventions, with an average increased income of USD1,411 (AUD2,110) per household.



The MDF-supported ASF campaign has benefitted **64,668** farmers to date, preventing losses of **USD7.6 million** (AUD 11.4 million). Of those benefitting, **50 per cent** are women.

MDF's ongoing work with pig breeders has started to produce piglets sought after by farmers. At the same time, it has become a safe source for the government's national restocking program. Business activity is also growing as pig farmers increasingly commercialise their businesses. Feed imports increased by 22 per cent, and the number of feed imports tripled between 2019 and 2021. There is also a strong sign of interest from an Indonesian feed producer to enter the Timor-Leste market.

MDF's work in the pig sector has contributed to improving the lives of pig farmers in Timor Leste while also making the sector more attractive for business investment. There are still many challenges to be addressed in a sector that is integral to the lives of Timorese farmers. However, as Joana and Maria have shown, Timorese pig farmers are resilient and unwilling to back down in the face of adversity.

