iCOW

Area of Focus: Livestock information

How it works: Launched in June 2011, iCow is enabling livestock farmers in Kenya to more accurately track their cows' gestation period via mobile phone. Farmers register their cows and their insemination date by SMS short code, and then receive periodic SMS prompts timed with vital days during the gestation period. The service also sends weekly SMS messages to subscribers with information and tips on breeding, nutrition, milk production efficiency, and other best dairy practices. With funding from the Indigo Trust, iCow has also set up a customer care center that registered users can call to provide feedback and receive live advice in several languages.

The service also enables farmers to locate the nearest veterinarian or artificial insemination specialist via SMS or through the iCow website. In addition, in August iCow established its iCow Soko, which enables farmers to trade livestock and livestock byproducts via mobile phone. Despite its name, farmers can trade more than just cows at iCow Soko, with other items for sale including chicken, goats, sheep, trees and goat milk.

Technology used: mobile phone, SMS, web-based interface, Ushahidi crowdmapping

Implementer/Funder: iCow was developed by Green Dreams Ltd., a private firm in Kenya. It has also received a $5,000 prize from the 2010 Apps4Africa challenge and £14,536 (~US$22,450) in grants from the Indigo Trust, along with technical and business support from DAI with funding from USAID.

Fees: Farmers pay 5 shillings (roughly US$0.05) per SMS, which amounts to approximately 1,200 shillings annually based on average estimated usage (~US$12.66).

Primary Markets: Kenya

Users: Primarily small scale livestock farmers. iCow currently has 1,500 farmers registered in 34 counties in Kenya. The age of farmers using the service tends to be primarily between 40-60+ years old.

Business Model: iCow operates on a fee-for-service model, with farmers paying a premium SMS rate for all interactions with the system. There are also plans to charge agricultural service providers and relevant government agencies for access to aggregate data. At this point it is too early to say if it will be able to reach a point of complete financial sustainability without external support.

Impact: Given that iCow has been publicly available for less than six months at the time of writing, it is still too early to assess what its impact will be. Although according to iCow's founder, Su Kahumbu, they estimate that reducing risks as a result of iCow's timed messages can save farmers up to £100 annually per cow (~US$160).

For more information visit: http://icow.co.ke/

Sources: Interview with iCow founder, Su Kuhambu, on November 23, 2011.

DISCLAIMER
The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Agency for International Development or the U.S. Government.