



## International Year of Women Farmer in Livestock Sector

**Rushikesh D. Sathe<sup>1</sup>, Rushikesh R. Kore<sup>2</sup>, M. G. Mote<sup>3</sup> Sumit Shingade<sup>4</sup> and Swapnil M. Bagul<sup>5</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairy Science, PGI, Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth, Rahuri.

<sup>2</sup>Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairy Science, PGI, Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth, Rahuri.

<sup>3</sup>Assistance Professor, Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairy Science, PGI, MPKV, Rahuri

<sup>4</sup> Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairy Science, PGI, Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth, Rahuri.

<sup>5</sup> Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairy Science, PGI, Mahatma Phule Krishi Vidyapeeth, Rahuri.

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### Abstract

The declaration of 2026 as the International Year of Women Farmers represents a landmark global initiative to recognize and strengthen the indispensable role of women in agriculture, particularly within the livestock sector. In the Indian context, women contribute nearly 70–75% of routine livestock-related activities, including feeding, milking, animal health care, breeding management, processing and value addition. Despite this substantial contribution, their work remains largely unpaid, under-recognized and constrained by limited access to assets, credit, training, technology and decision-making platforms.

It comprehensively examines the multifaceted role of women across the livestock value chain, drawing from historical, cultural, socio-economic and policy perspectives. It highlights women's contributions to sustainable livestock management, indigenous breed conservation, household nutrition and climate resilience. The study reviews key national and global indices, government missions and women-centric initiatives that support women livestock farmers, including Self-Help Groups, extension models like Pashu Sakhi, and livelihood programs such as Lakhpati Didi. Success stories from grassroots entrepreneurship, research and innovation further illustrate women's transformative potential. Overall, the

International Year of Women Farmers (2026) serves as a catalyst to redefine women as farmers, entrepreneurs, researchers, and leaders, emphasizing that empowering women in livestock is central to inclusive growth, food security and sustainable rural development in India.

**Key Words:** International Year, Women Farmers, Livestock, Livelihood programs, Rural development



## Introduction

The declaration of 2026 as the **International Year of Women Farmers** is an important step in recognizing the major role women play in agriculture and livestock activities. Around the world, and especially in India, women are deeply involved in farming work, even though their contribution is often not fully acknowledged. The idea behind this initiative is to highlight their efforts and ensure they receive proper support and recognition.

The term “women farmers” includes women from rural, semi-urban, urban and tribal areas. Their work is not limited to crop production; it also includes activities like collecting forest products, managing livestock and supporting family-based farming systems. In India, livestock farming is closely connected with the daily routine of women, making their role even more significant.

According to the World Bank (2019), women make up nearly 70% of the workforce in livestock-related activities in India. They are actively involved in feeding animals, milking, cleaning sheds, taking care of animal health and processing milk and other products. Even with such a large contribution, much of their work remains unpaid and is often seen as household duty rather than professional work. The International Year of Women Farmers aims to change this situation by encouraging better policies, improved access to resources and inclusion of women in modern agricultural systems.

In tribal and pastoral communities, women have an even more important role. They manage small animals like goats and poultry and also take care of indigenous cattle, often working in difficult environments such as forests or dry grazing lands. Recognizing them as farmers instead of helpers can help them get benefits like loans, insurance, training and access to new technologies. This recognition can also improve livestock productivity, animal health and family nutrition.

This initiative is also connected with broader goals like gender equality, food security and sustainable development. In India, schemes such as the National Livestock Mission and Rashtriya Gokul Mission, along with women-led Self-Help Groups (SHGs), are already working to support women in livestock farming. With the help of new technologies like AI tools, mobile advisory services and community-based animal health programs, women farmers can improve their work and income. Overall, the International Year of Women Farmers (2026) is not just a symbolic event. It is an opportunity to change how we view women in agriculture, especially in livestock farming. It encourages society to recognize their knowledge and skills, and to create a more inclusive and fair system that supports their growth and contribution in the future.

## Objectives

### 1. Recognition (Making the “Invisible” Visible)

Recognition is one of the most important goals of the International Year of Women Farmers (2026), especially in the Indian livestock sector. In India, women do a large share of the work related to livestock, such as feeding animals, milking, cleaning sheds, taking care of calves and even processing milk at home. Despite this, their contribution is often not officially recorded. Many times, they are simply considered as “helpers” instead of being recognized as farmers.

This lack of recognition creates several problems. When women are not officially identified as farmers, they find it difficult to access training programs, bank loans, insurance schemes and other government benefits. They are also less involved in decision-making processes related to farming and livestock management. Because of this, their potential remains underutilized.



To solve this issue, it is important to properly recognize women as livestock farmers. This can be done by collecting gender-specific data, giving them official farmer status and including them in extension services and training programs. When women are clearly identified as farmers, policies and schemes can be designed in a way that actually meets their needs. Recognition is not only important for economic reasons but also for social development. When women are acknowledged for their work, it increases their confidence and improves their position within the family and society. It also helps them take on leadership roles in dairy cooperatives and farmer groups.

Overall, giving proper recognition to women in livestock farming is a necessary step for achieving fairness and inclusive growth. It ensures that development programs reflect the real situation on the ground and support those who are actually doing the work. This approach can help build a stronger and more balanced rural economy in India.

## **2. Closing the Gender Gap in Resources**

Reducing the gender gap in access to resources is very important for strengthening India's livestock sector. Even though women do most of the daily work related to animals, they often do not own livestock or land and have limited access to credit, veterinary care, training and modern tools. This unequal situation affects productivity and also keeps many rural women in low-income conditions.

The International Year of Women Farmers (2026) highlights the need to provide equal access to important resources such as livestock ownership, insurance, quality feed, breeding services and digital advisory support. In India, women-led groups like Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and initiatives such as Pashu Sakhi can play a major role in improving access. When women receive proper resources and support, farms perform better. Milk production increases, animal health improves and household income becomes more stable, benefiting the entire rural economy.

## **3. Sustainable Development and Food Security**

Women livestock farmers have a very important role in ensuring sustainable development and food security in India. They are directly involved in taking care of animals, which helps in providing essential foods like milk, eggs and meat for their families. Their daily involvement allows them to follow better practices such as proper use of fodder, maintaining local breeds and recycling waste like manure in farming.

The International Year of Women Farmers (2026) highlights that when women are supported, livestock systems become more stable and environmentally friendly. In many rural areas, women-managed dairy and backyard poultry act as a support system during crop failure, helping families survive difficult times. Providing women with training in climate-friendly livestock practices, value addition and small-scale marketing can further improve their income and food availability. Overall, empowering women in livestock farming strengthens rural livelihoods, improves nutrition and supports long-term sustainability in agriculture.

## **4. Addressing Structural Barriers**

In India's livestock sector, many women still face structural barriers that limit their full participation. Social norms, restricted mobility, unequal property rights and male-dominated systems often prevent women from making important decisions. Even though women do most of the daily work, decisions related to selling animals, using income or adopting new technology are usually taken by men.



The International Year of Women Farmers (2026) highlights the need to remove these barriers and create equal opportunities. This can be done by promoting gender-sensitive policies, providing inclusive extension services and ensuring legal recognition of women as farmers. At the local level, steps like organizing women-friendly training, improving awareness and encouraging their participation in cooperatives are very important. Programs such as National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and women-led producer groups show that when barriers are reduced, women can become successful livestock entrepreneurs. Removing these challenges is necessary for achieving fairness, better productivity and overall rural development.

## 5. Policy and Global Collaboration

Strong policies and global cooperation are very important to continue the progress made during the International Year of Women Farmers (2026). In India, livestock policies need to focus on women by providing proper support, funding and reliable data. When policies are designed with a gender perspective, they help women get better access to training, insurance, markets and climate-related support.

Working with international organizations like Food and Agriculture Organization, International Fund for Agricultural Development and UN Women can bring new ideas, technologies and successful models from other countries. These collaborations help improve livestock practices and support women farmers more effectively. In India, linking livestock development programs with gender goals can make the system more inclusive. It also helps promote local breeds, support pastoral communities and encourage women-led innovations. Overall, good policies and international partnerships ensure that women are active contributors to rural development, food security and sustainable agriculture.

### Role of Women in Livestock Indian Perspective under the International Year of Women Farmers (2026)

Strong policies and international cooperation are essential to carry forward the impact of the International Year of Women Farmers (2026). In India, livestock policies should clearly focus on women by ensuring access to finance, training and reliable information. When policies are designed with a gender perspective, women can more easily benefit from services like insurance, market linkages and climate-related support.

Partnerships with global organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization, International Fund for Agricultural Development and UN Women can bring new knowledge, technologies and successful practices from different countries. These collaborations help improve livestock systems and create better opportunities for women farmers.





Women also play a major role in everyday livestock activities in India. They are deeply involved in milk production, egg collection and rearing of goats and sheep. In fact, India's dairy sector depends heavily on women's work at the household level. Apart from production, women also take part in processing activities like making curd, butter, ghee and paneer, which helps increase family income and improves nutrition. Another important contribution of women is in conserving indigenous animal breeds. In many rural and tribal areas, women take care of local cattle, goats and sheep that are well adapted to local climate conditions. They also manage waste by collecting dung and converting it into manure, compost or even biogas. These activities support environmentally friendly and sustainable farming.

### **Key Reports and Indices Relevant to the International Year of Women Farmers (2026) in the Livestock Sector**

It is the major global and national reports and indices that are crucial for understanding the status of women farmers, particularly in the livestock sector, and for framing evidence-based discussions during the International Year of Women Farmers (2026). These indices provide measurable insights into gender disparities, women's participation in the workforce, health, empowerment, and alignment with sustainable development goals.

The Global Gender Gap Index, published by the World Economic Forum, assesses gender-based gaps in economic participation, education, health, and political empowerment. In the Indian livestock context, this index highlights the persistent gap between women's actual contribution to livestock production and their access to economic resources, land ownership, income, and decision-making power (World Economic Forum, 2023).

The Gender Inequality Index (GII), developed by UNDP, focuses on reproductive health, empowerment, and labour market participation. For women livestock farmers in India, the GII reflects structural inequalities such as limited access to extension services, training, and institutional credit, despite their heavy involvement in animal care, dairying, and small ruminant rearing.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), and SDG 8 (Decent Work), provide a global framework within which women's roles in livestock can be strengthened (United Nations, 2015). Women-centered livestock development directly contributes to food security, nutrition, poverty reduction, and climate resilience in rural India.

At the national level, the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) offers valuable data on women's health, nutrition, decision-making power, and household-level indicators, all of which influence women's capacity to participate effectively in livestock farming. Similarly, the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) captures women's workforce participation, including them often under reported engagement in livestock and allied activities.

Together, these reports and indices form an essential evidence base to highlight gaps, monitor progress, and guide policies aimed at recognizing, empowering, and supporting women farmers in India's livestock sector during and beyond 2026.

### **Government Targets Supporting Women Farmers in the Livestock Sector: Indian Perspective**

Several Government of India initiatives closely support the goals of the International Year of Women Farmers (2026), especially in the livestock sector. These programs aim to improve rural livelihoods, encourage self-reliance and ensure that women farmers are included in development. The idea of Flood Revolution 2.0 focuses on increasing milk production, improving animal healthcare and strengthening dairy systems (DAHD, 2023).



Since women are mainly involved in dairy work like feeding, milking and processing, this initiative directly benefits them and supports women-led dairy activities.

The vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat promotes local production and small-scale entrepreneurship (Government of India, 2020). In livestock farming, women contribute through activities like poultry, goat rearing and small dairy units, helping families become financially stable. Similarly, the Vocal for Local campaign encourages the use of locally produced goods. Women play a major role in making traditional dairy products, manure and other livestock-based items, which support local markets.

The goal of Doubling Farmers' Income highlights livestock as an important source of income (Government of India, 2021). For many women, it provides regular earnings and reduces financial risk. The long-term vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 also focuses on women's empowerment in agriculture. Programs like A-HELP further support this by training women as livestock service providers. These efforts are also linked with global goals like SDG 2, SDG 5 and SDG 8, ensuring better food security, gender equality and employment. Overall, these initiatives create a strong system to support and empower women in India's livestock sector.

### **Ancient Role of Women in the Livestock Sector: Indian Cultural and Historical Context**

The role of women in livestock farming in India has very deep historical and cultural roots. The International Year of Women Farmers (2026) reminds us that women's involvement in animal husbandry is not something new, but a long-standing tradition that has existed since ancient times. Looking at history helps us understand how important women have always been in managing livestock and supporting rural life. In ancient India, livestock was closely connected with religion, culture and the household economy. The idea of Pashupati reflects the respect given to animals in society. In such a system, women naturally took on the role of caregivers. They were mainly responsible for looking after animals and handling dairy-related work. Activities like milking and preparing products such as curd, butter and ghee were usually managed by women. These products were not only part of daily food but also used in religious rituals, showing how closely livestock was linked to both life and belief systems. These early practices later became the base for today's dairy farming in India.





Women's contribution can also be seen in traditional cultural activities related to livestock. Events like Jallikattu, Kambala and Bailgada races are well-known examples. Even though men usually take part in these events publicly, women play an important role behind the scenes. They take care of feeding, health management and preparation of animals, which ensures the continuation of these traditions (Mishra, S., 2016).

In tribal and pastoral communities, women have always had a strong connection with livestock. They manage small animals like goats and poultry and also take part in forest-based livestock systems. Their knowledge of local conditions helps them follow sustainable grazing and breeding practices. Cultural traditions such as Arsha Vivah also show the link between women and livestock. In this type of marriage, cattle were given as a symbolic gift, highlighting their value in rural life. Women entering such households became active participants in livestock care, dairy processing and maintaining food security.

Pastoral traditions like Gavalani and Pandhav further explain the important role of women. Gavalani, often expressed through songs and stories, reflects daily life with animals and shows the emotional bond women share with them. Pandhav traditions involve seasonal migration of livestock, where women contribute by collecting fodder, caring for animals and sharing traditional veterinary knowledge. These practices also support sustainable use of natural resources and help communities adapt to changing environmental conditions. All these examples clearly show that women have always been key contributors to livestock management in India. They have protected indigenous breeds, maintained traditional knowledge and followed sustainable practices for generations. However, their role has often remained unrecognized.

Recognizing this historical contribution is very important today. It gives strong support to the idea that women should be empowered through better policies, access to technology and proper training. The International Year of Women Farmers (2026) acts as a link between the past and the future. It highlights that women are not just workers but also knowledge holders and leaders in the livestock sector. By valuing their contribution, India can build a more inclusive, sustainable and strong livestock system for the future.

### **Government Initiatives Empowering Women Farmers in the Livestock Sector: Indian Context**

In India, the government has introduced several initiatives to strengthen the role of women in the livestock sector. These efforts are closely connected with the vision of the International Year of Women Farmers (2026), which aims to recognize women not just as helpers but as active farmers, entrepreneurs and decision-makers. Over time, policies have started focusing more on providing women with resources, skills and opportunities in livestock-based livelihoods.

One important step is the expansion of the Kisan Credit Card (KCC) scheme to include livestock farmers. This allows women involved in dairy, goat rearing, poultry and piggery to access timely loans. With this financial support, they can purchase animals, buy feed and manage healthcare needs without depending on local moneylenders. Easy access to credit helps women run their livestock activities more efficiently.

Another major initiative is the Rashtriya Gokul Mission, which focuses on improving and conserving native cattle breeds (DAHD, 2022). Women play a key role in maintaining these breeds at the household level. Their participation supports better breeding practices and helps ensure sustainable milk production in the long run. The Lakhpati Didi Yojana (2023) is also an important program aimed at increasing women's income. It encourages women from Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to take up activities like dairy farming, backyard poultry and value addition of animal products. Through such enterprises, women can earn a stable income and become financially independent.



Modern technology is also being introduced through schemes like the Namo Drone Didi Yojana (Ministry of Rural Development, 2023). Although mainly focused on agriculture, it also benefits livestock management. Women can use drones for monitoring grazing areas, checking fodder availability and even supporting disease surveillance, which opens up new learning and employment opportunities.

The National Livestock Mission (Government of India, 2023) further supports women by promoting entrepreneurship, better breeds and improved fodder resources. At the grassroots level, initiatives like Krishi Sakhi and Pashu Sakhi have created new roles for rural women. Krishi Sakhis guide farmers in crop planning and sustainable practices, while Pashu Sakhis provide basic animal healthcare, vaccination support and advisory services within villages. These women act as a bridge between farmers and formal extension systems.

In addition, the National Education Policy 2020 promotes skill development and vocational training in agriculture and livestock sectors (Government of India, 2020). This helps prepare young women for future careers in animal husbandry and related fields. Overall, these initiatives are creating a supportive environment where women can actively participate in the livestock sector. They improve access to finance, training, technology and decision-making opportunities. By empowering women, these programs not only enhance productivity but also contribute to better income, nutrition and rural development. Together, they align national goals with global efforts for gender equality and ensure that women remain at the centre of India's livestock transformation beyond 2026.

### **Women Empowerment through Livestock: Pathways in the Indian Context**

The livestock sector plays a very important role in empowering women in India, which is also a key focus of the International Year of Women Farmers (2026). For many rural families, especially those with small or no land, livestock is one of the easiest and most practical ways for women to earn income and become financially independent. One of the biggest advantages of livestock farming is that it provides regular income. Activities like selling milk, collecting eggs and raising goats or poultry bring daily or weekly earnings, unlike crop farming which is seasonal. According to the World Bank (2019), this steady flow of income helps women manage household expenses, support children's education and improve overall food security. It also increases their confidence and role in decision-making within the family.

Ownership of livestock is another important factor in women's empowerment. When animals such as cows, goats or poultry are owned by women or registered in their names, it improves their social status and financial security. It also helps them handle difficult situations like financial emergencies more effectively. Livestock activities also help women become part of the formal financial system. Through Self-Help Groups (SHGs), dairy cooperatives and schemes like the Kisan Credit Card, women can access bank accounts, savings options, loans and insurance. SHGs especially provide support through group savings, training and shared knowledge.

In addition, livestock farming opens up opportunities for small businesses. Women can start activities like milk processing, feed preparation, backyard poultry or making products such as ghee, paneer and organic manure. These small enterprises help them move from basic subsistence work to earning profits in the market. Women also play a key role in the livestock value chain, from production to processing and selling. When they are involved at every stage, they can earn better income and gain recognition for their work. Overall, empowering women through livestock is not just about equality, but also about improving rural development, sustainability and economic growth in India.



## Women With Vision

This highlights a set of successful women role models whose journeys reflect the transformative potential of women's participation in agriculture and livestock systems in India. In the context of the International Year of Women Farmers (2026), these examples collectively demonstrate how women across diverse socio economic and regional backgrounds have emerged as innovators, leaders, entrepreneurs, and policy influencers, reshaping India's agri livestock landscape.

Rahibai Popere, popularly known as the *Seed Mother of Maharashtra*, represents grassroots resilience and indigenous knowledge. Although primarily associated with seed conservation, her work strongly influences livestock-based mixed farming systems. By conserving native crop varieties, she ensures availability of quality fodder and promotes sustainable crop–livestock integration, a practice vital for smallholder livestock farmers in rainfed regions.

Shraddha Dhawan, associated with modern agribusiness and policy advocacy, symbolizes educated women professionals contributing to value chain efficiency. Her work highlights how women's leadership in agribusiness management, nutrition security, and allied sectors can strengthen livestock value chains, particularly in processing, quality assurance, and market linkages.

Dr. Swati Nayak, a renowned agricultural scientist and policymaker, represents women's contribution at the science policy interface. Her leadership in promoting climate-resilient agriculture and digital innovations has indirect but profound implications for livestock farmers, especially women. Policy frameworks shaped by such leaders support technology dissemination, extension reforms, and gender-sensitive livestock development programs.

Dr. Chanda Nimbaker exemplifies women's role in veterinary science, education, and extension. Women veterinarians and livestock experts play a crucial role in addressing animal health, productivity, and welfare at the grassroots level. Their presence improves women farmers' access to advisory services, as cultural norms often limit interactions with male professionals in rural India.

The figure of "Kisan Chachi", a popular digital educator and influencer, reflects the power of social media and communication platforms in empowering women farmers. Through simple, relatable messaging, such role models encourage women to adopt improved livestock practices, access government schemes, and recognize themselves as farmers rather than helpers.

Raimati Ghiurai represents tribal and indigenous women whose traditional livestock practices contribute to biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods. Tribal women often manage backyard poultry, pigs, goats, and indigenous cattle breeds. Their knowledge systems are increasingly being recognized for their role in low-input, climate-resilient livestock production.

Vanita Pise (Satara) symbolizes rural women entrepreneurs who have successfully established dairy, goatery, or poultry enterprises at the local level. Such women demonstrate how access to Self-Help Groups (SHGs), credit, training, and cooperative institutions can convert livestock rearing into profitable enterprises, aligning with initiatives like *Lakhpati Didi* and the *National Livestock Mission*.

Finally, Rekha Bai (Madhya Pradesh) reflects the empowerment of women from marginalized and smallholder backgrounds. Her journey underscores how livestock ownership especially small ruminants and backyard poultry can enhance household income, nutrition, and social recognition for women in central Indian states.



Collectively, these examples emphasize that women's success in the livestock sector is multidimensional spanning grassroots innovation, scientific leadership, entrepreneurship, extension, and digital advocacy. In the Indian context, where nearly 70% of livestock work is performed by women, recognizing and amplifying such role models is essential. The International Year of Women Farmers (2026) provides a global platform to celebrate these contributions, inspire future generations, and strengthen gender-responsive livestock policies that support inclusive, sustainable rural development.

### **Success Story: National Gopal Ratna Award 2025 – Shraddha Dhawan (Ahilyanagar)**

The story of Shraddha Dhawan from Ahilyanagar is a strong example of how women are making a mark in the livestock sector. Her achievement of receiving the National Gopal Ratna Award in 2025 highlights the growing recognition of women farmers, especially in line with the vision of the International Year of Women Farmers (2026).

Her journey shows that with the right knowledge and support, women can turn livestock farming into a successful and sustainable business. In India, women already handle a large share of daily livestock work like feeding animals, milking and taking care of their health. Still, their efforts often go unnoticed. Shraddha Dhawan's success changes this perception by showing what is possible when women adopt scientific and modern practices. She improved her dairy farm by using better cattle breeds, maintaining proper feeding systems and following regular vaccination and health check-ups. She also focused on balanced nutrition and proper waste management, which helped increase milk production and maintain animal health. These steps not only improved productivity but also ensured better care of animals.

Her work also reflects the role of women as entrepreneurs. Instead of limiting herself to basic farming, she adopted practices like record keeping, value addition and linking her products to the market. This approach helped her earn more income and manage her farm in a more professional way. Her success is closely connected with schemes like the Rashtriya Gokul Mission and the National Livestock Mission, along with support from Self-Help Groups. From the perspective of the International Year of Women Farmers (2026), her story represents empowerment and innovation. It shows that when women get access to training, financial support and modern tools, they can achieve great success in livestock farming.

### **Success Story in Research: Zero Cow Factory – Parini Kapadia**

The idea of the **Zero Cow Factory**, developed by Parini Kapadia, is a very interesting and modern innovation in the dairy and livestock field. It is especially important in the context of the International Year of Women Farmers (2026) because it shows how women are not only involved in traditional farming but are also leading new research and technological changes. This concept is different from regular dairy farming. Instead of using cows to produce milk, it uses advanced science methods like fermentation and biotechnology. In this process, tiny microorganisms are designed to produce milk proteins that are similar to those found in animal milk. These proteins are then mixed with plant-based ingredients to create dairy-like products. This method reduces the need for animals and helps in saving natural resources.

In India, dairy farming is mostly done by small farmers, especially women, who take care of animals every day. But this system faces many challenges such as high feed costs, climate change, animal diseases and limited land. The Zero Cow Factory does not replace traditional farming but offers an alternative solution that can reduce pressure on the environment while still meeting the demand for milk products. Parini Kapadia's work shows how different fields like microbiology, food science and technology can come together to create something new. It also proves that women can play a leading role in research and innovation related to agriculture and livestock. For India, this idea can open new opportunities for women. Women involved in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) or



small businesses can take part in making value-added products, managing small processing units or working in quality control. This can increase income and create new job options.

Overall, the Zero Cow Factory is a great example of how science and innovation can support sustainability. It also highlights the growing role of women in shaping the future of food systems. This success story shows that empowering women in both farming and research is important for building a strong, sustainable and inclusive livestock sector.

### **My Initiatives for Empowering Women Farmers in the Livestock Sector**

It presents a comprehensive framework of **women-centric initiatives in the livestock sector**, aligned with the vision of the **International Year of Women Farmers (2026)**. The central theme, “*My Initiatives*,” reflects an integrated approach to strengthen women’s participation, leadership, and income generation in Indian livestock systems, where women already play a silent but dominant role.

The formation and strengthening of **FPOs (Farmer Producer Organizations)** and **FPCs (Farmer Producer Companies)** are key institutional initiatives. In the Indian livestock context, women-led dairy and goatery FPOs enable collective input procurement, milk aggregation, value addition, and better market access. These institutions reduce exploitation by middlemen and enhance women’s bargaining power, contributing directly to rural livelihoods and economic independence.

The concept of a **Cow Bank** and “**One Woman – One Indigenous Cow**” emphasizes conservation-linked livelihood models. Indigenous cattle such as Gir, Sahiwal, and Deoni are climate-resilient and culturally significant in India. By providing cows through community-based cow banks, women farmers gain a sustainable asset that supports milk production, organic manure generation, and household nutrition, while also promoting indigenous breed conservation.

**Cow Bank and the “One Woman – One Indigenous Cow”** initiatives represent innovative, women-centered approaches to strengthening livelihoods, nutrition, and indigenous breed conservation in rural India. A *Cow Bank* functions as a community-managed livestock credit system, where cows are provided to women farmers or self-help groups, particularly from marginal and landless households. Instead of monetary repayment, beneficiaries often return the first female calf to the Cow Bank, allowing the asset to circulate within the community. This model promotes collective ownership, social solidarity, and long-term sustainability while reducing dependence on formal credit systems.

The “**One Woman – One Indigenous Cow**” concept builds on similar principles but places the woman farmer at the center of ownership and decision-making. By allocating one native cow such as Gir, Sahiwal, Tharparkar or Red Sindhi to each woman, the initiative directly enhances household income through milk sales, manure, and biogas potential. Indigenous cows are well adapted to Indian agro-climatic conditions, require lower inputs, and show better resistance to local diseases, making them particularly suitable for women-managed smallholder systems.

From the perspective of the **International Year of Women Farmers (2026)**, these initiatives recognize women not merely as helpers but as primary livestock owners and entrepreneurs. In India, women perform a majority of tasks related to feeding, milking, breeding care, and calf management, yet ownership and access to assets remain limited. Cow Banks and one-cow-per-woman models help bridge this gender asset gap, improve women’s bargaining power within households, and support nutritional security through regular access to milk.



Beyond economics, these programs contribute to conservation of indigenous breeds, promotion of organic farming through dung and urine-based inputs, and climate-resilient livestock systems. By linking women's empowerment with sustainable livestock development, Cow Bank and "One Woman – One Indigenous Cow" initiatives embody an inclusive pathway toward resilient rural livelihoods in India.

**Contract production of animals** introduces assured income opportunities for women through tie-ups with cooperatives, research institutes, and private players. This model reduces market risk and encourages adoption of scientific rearing practices. Similarly, **Animal Tourism** (gaushala visits, rural dairy experiences, indigenous breed exhibitions) offers diversified income sources, especially for women and youth in peri-urban and rural areas.

Animal tourism refers to tourism activities centered on livestock, domesticated animals, and traditional animal-based livelihoods, offering visitors experiential learning while generating rural income. In the Indian context, this includes gaushala visits, dairy farm tourism, camel and yak safaris, pastoral festivals, and indigenous breed conservation farms. From the perspective of the International Year of Women Farmers (2026), animal tourism provides a promising avenue for women farmers to diversify income beyond conventional milk or meat production. Rural women play a key role in managing animals, hosting visitors, demonstrating milking, fodder preparation, value-added dairy products, and sharing traditional knowledge. Such initiatives enhance women's visibility as entrepreneurs and cultural custodians. Animal tourism also supports conservation of indigenous livestock breeds, promotes ethical animal care, and strengthens rural–urban linkages. When integrated with self-help groups and cooperatives, animal tourism empowers women, creates local employment, and contributes to sustainable livestock-based livelihoods in India.

Platforms such as **UN Women Talk** symbolize advocacy, capacity building, and global recognition of women livestock farmers. Such forums amplify women's voices, promote policy dialogue, and highlight grassroots innovations. Overall, these initiatives collectively address economic, social, and ecological dimensions of livestock farming.

In conclusion, the initiatives showcased in this slide represent a holistic, inclusive, and future-ready strategy. They strongly resonate with the goals of the International Year of Women Farmers (2026) by recognizing Indian women not just as livestock caretakers, but as **entrepreneurs, conservationists, and change-makers** in the livestock sector.

### **Challenges and Barriers Faced by Women Farmers in the Livestock Sector**

The key challenges and barriers faced by women farmers in the livestock sector, which are central concerns for the International Year of Women Farmers (2026) are mentioned here. In India, women contribute significantly to livestock rearing ranging from feeding, milking, cleaning sheds, to caring for young and sick animals yet their efforts remain largely unpaid, under-recognized, and unsupported.

One of the most persistent barriers is the lack of asset ownership. Although women manage livestock daily, ownership of animals, land, and productive resources is often registered in the name of male family members. This limits women's decision-making power and restricts their eligibility for institutional credit, insurance, and government support schemes.

Restricted market access further constrains women livestock farmers. Cultural norms, mobility constraints, and limited exposure prevent women from directly accessing milk markets, livestock fairs, and input suppliers. As a result, women are often dependent on intermediaries, leading to lower income realization for their labor.



Another critical issue is unequal access to finance and credit. Without collateral or formal documentation, women find it difficult to obtain loans for purchasing animals, feed, or improved technologies. Despite the presence of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and microfinance institutions in India, coverage remains uneven, especially in remote and tribal regions.

Women livestock farmers also face health and safety risks, including exposure to zoonotic diseases, injuries during animal handling, and the physical burden of long working hours. Limited access to veterinary services, protective equipment, and health insurance aggravates these risks.

The technical and information gap is equally significant. Extension services, training programs, and digital advisory platforms often fail to reach women effectively, resulting in lower adoption of scientific practices and productivity-enhancing technologies.

Finally, the burden of unpaid care work balancing livestock responsibilities with household chores and caregiving reduces women's time for skill development and income-generating activities.

In conclusion, addressing these interlinked challenges is essential to truly empower women in the livestock sector. The International Year of Women Farmers (2026) provides a global platform to advocate for gender-sensitive policies, inclusive institutions, and targeted investments that recognize and strengthen the role of Indian women livestock farmers.

## Conclusion

1. Women farmers are the backbone of the livestock sector, contributing extensively to animal rearing, feeding, health care, and product processing, particularly in rural India.
2. The livestock sector serves as a powerful tool for empowering women by enhancing their skills, confidence, and participation in household and farm-level decision-making.
3. Engagement in dairying, small ruminant rearing, and backyard poultry promotes financial inclusion through regular income and access to credit and self-help groups.
4. Livestock-based activities generate employment opportunities for women, ensuring livelihood security and income diversification.
5. Recognition of women's roles in livestock helps reduce gender disparities in agriculture and allied sectors.
6. Ownership of animals strengthens asset ownership, improving economic resilience and social security.
7. The International Year of Women Farmers highlights global recognition of women livestock farmers.
8. Ultimately, women-led livestock systems contribute significantly to household nutrition and global food security

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