Farmers in Gatsibo are building more market-oriented pig businesses with support from the THRIVE 2030 project.

For years, pig farming in Rwanda's Eastern Province was largely a backyard activity: a few animals, little training, uncertain markets and frequent losses to disease.

That was the reality for Venant of Kiramuruzi, Gatsibo District, when he decided to try pig farming in 2021. Today he keeps 20 pigs, leads a 12-member farmer cooperative and trains others to follow the path he took.

His inspiration was a neighbour whose herd had grown from five pigs to about 200, and who sold dozens of animals every few months but would not share his knowledge. Venant was determined to learn anyway. A veterinary friend, Emmanuel, taught him the basics, and he started with a single pig bought from a neighbour, an artificially inseminated sow that produced 11 piglets. "That turned out to be the start of everything. I started small to avoid losses," he says.

Venant is one of the farmers supported by the THRIVE 2030 Pig Value Chain Project, a seven-year initiative working across 14 districts and implemented by DUHAMIC-ADRI in partnership with World Vision Rwanda. The project helps farmers move from subsistence pig keeping towards market-oriented businesses, with a focus on improved breeds, skills, markets and livelihoods.

Improved breeding has been especially important. Artificial insemination gives farmers access to better genetics instead of relying on whichever boar happens to be nearby.

A few kilometres away in Nyabisindu Sector, Theophile is building a business on the same principle. A trained agriculturalist, he started Neyo Pig Farm in 2024 and says anyone serious about pig farming must understand breeds and their qualities.

"Understand the quality of pigs you are rearing and what breed suits your purpose, such as Large White or Landrace," he advises.

His clean pens include a separate enclosure for sows about to give birth.His first litters produced eight and 10 piglets, and two later litters produced 14 and 10.

“To be a pig farmer, you need to have passion for it, as well as love and being friendly with animals,” he says.

However, better-quality pigs alone do not guarantee a profitable business. Farmers also need reliable markets and services. Mertha Uzayisenga, the DUHAMIC-ADRI field officer responsible for Gatsibo, Kayonza and Nyagatare districts, says the project links farmers with markets, financial institutions and other value chain actors, so they are no longer dependent on occasional buyers.

Venant now sells piglets every 45 days for about Rwf50,000 each. On one occasion a buyer took an entire litter of 13. He increasingly keeps some piglets to expand his own herd rather than selling everything.

Theophile has diversified further, earning income from piglets, mature pigs and breeding services. He also uses manure on his soybean, Irish potato and maize fields, and estimates his farm is now worth more than Rwf5.6 million.

Feed remains one of the biggest challenges for both men. Venant sometimes travels to Rwamagana, Nyagatare or Kayonza to buy it, and transport adds to the cost. Theophile supplements available feed with local ingredients such as maize, rice husks and milk, particularly when feed is scarce.

The project’s emphasis on capacity building is creating a ripple effect. Venant has trained more than 20 people, while Theophile mentors 10 young people interested in pig farming and helps them develop their own projects.

Both urge beginners to resist the temptation to expand too quickly. “Start with one,” Theophile tells young farmers. “Go slowly, build enough pens and expand after a year.”

Venant has already moved well beyond his first pig. Besides his own herd, he leads Dukore, a cooperative of 12 farmers and hopes to shift increasingly towards selling mature pigs.

Theophile plans to expand his operation and bring his brother into a second pig-rearing venture.

Their journeys reflect the wider ambition of THRIVE 2030. The project has coached

more than 7,700 pig farmers, supported the construction of more than 3,000 improved pigsties, facilitated the purchase of more than 4,200 improved-breed pigs and supported the insemination of more than 1,000 pigs.

For farmers in Gatsibo, though, the numbers are best understood inside their pens: a few pigs becoming growing herds, and a backyard activity gradually becoming a business.