



2011 AWARD Fellow
Adey Melesse Yalew

Position	Associate researcher
Institution	Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research (EIAR)
Country	Ethiopia
MSc	Applied microbiology, Addis Ababa University, 2009
Mentor	Dr. Maria Alexandra Jorge, Gene bank manager Forage Diversity, International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI)

Research area: Using available animal feed in a safe and quality manner to improve productivity for the better livelihood of rural and smallholder livestock farmers.

Adey Melesse Yalew concedes that a research career in livestock feed quality is an unusual choice for a woman raised in the capital city by a father, who was a banker, and a clothes-designing mother. “Originally, I wanted to be a medical doctor, but the available openings at university were so limited in 1990 that only a few applicants gained admission,” she says. “I saw family friends, who were agriculture graduates, being successful, so I pursued what has become my second passion.”

Yalew completed her bachelor’s degree in animal science at Alemaya University of Agriculture and went on to do a master’s degree in applied microbiology. Today, as an associate researcher at EIAR, she is determined to help Ethiopian famers produce improved fodder for their livestock.

Ethiopia has huge livestock and poultry resources, however, animal feed—especially protein-based products—is in serious short supply. Yalew says that the only thing some farmers can afford to feed their cattle is sun-dried poultry manure. With her fellow researchers, Yalew is using computerized programs to help determine the best, low-cost, natural feed options. She is setting up the new animal biotechnology laboratory at EIAR, based on her previous experience at ILRI as a research technologist on the rumen microbiology project.

“For instance, we looked at adapting acacia trees for their nutrition, but we learned that they can become toxic for cattle.” She has submitted a research proposal on the use of multipurpose leguminous plants by using the ruminants’ rumen ecology to alleviate the problem of anti-nutritional factors. “Through time, I know we will manage to solve poor farmers’ feed problems,” says Yalew confidently.

Yalew wants to obtain a PhD and to conduct livestock feed research integrated with forestry and ecology. “This type of research really needs farmers’ participation; their indigenous knowledge is so valuable,” she remarks.

Working with farmers gives Yalew great satisfaction. She conducts regular training with both men and women on poultry raising and dairy cattle production. “I’m not locked in a lab. I know what my community looks

like, where my food comes from, and how farmers struggle,” she says. “When I see eggs in the supermarket, I know how the farmer produced them and how much work it took to put that food on the table.”

As an advocate for smallholders, Yalew aspires to be the director of an international agency, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, so she can influence agricultural policy and decisions. “I want to do more in feed and food security by promoting linkages between African countries benefiting farmers. It’s AWARD that made me dream of this. Had I had the benefit of AWARD 15 years ago, I know where I would be in my career today.”

During her fellowship, Yalew plans to work on becoming more assertive and self-confident so she will be ready for the next promotion opportunity. “There are so few women in agricultural research in Ethiopia, so you have to stand up and be noticed. However, I tend to put others first and take a back seat. I give credit easily to my peers, but I don’t give it to myself. I want to change that.”

Yalew is thankful that she delights in her work, especially when good positions for female researchers are hard to come by. “You have to love what you do; it’s not about the money you earn,” says this mother of two children. “I am passionate about my research, and I will be happier when I have the skills to contribute more. I believe that God creates us with a purpose—to do something for others and for the betterment of the world.”

Yalew is one of a growing number of African women agricultural scientists who have won an AWARD Fellowship. AWARD is a professional development program that strengthens the research and leadership skills of African women in agricultural science, empowering them to contribute more effectively to poverty alleviation and food security in sub-Saharan Africa. AWARD is generously supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the United States Agency for International Development. For more information, visit www.awardfellowships.org
