

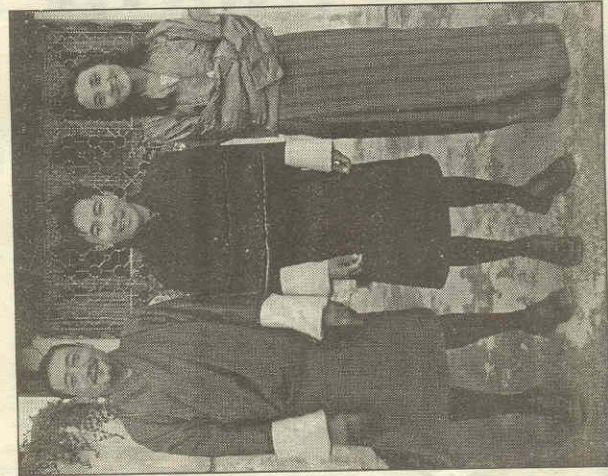
# More than just Swiss chocolates

BY SONAM DEMA

**Thimphu:** Who said life on a farm is all about field work. It can also be about traveling abroad, exchanging ideas and bringing back modern methods. Indeed, there are several Bhutanese farmers who will be most keen to share their foreign experiences.

The most recent returnees from a three-month stay in Switzerland brought back more than just Swiss knives, boots and chocolates – they are all geared to test Swiss seeds of flowers, vegetables and fruits on their farms.

Janchub Tsheten from Bumthang, Namgay Wangmo from Haa and Rangsim Tsojay from Pemagatshel were the three farmers selected for the Switzerland trip



>> Just back from Switzerland

this year.

“The trip to Switzerland is the most memorable journey of my life. I will miss all the Swiss families and the Swiss friends who called me Sammy because they couldn’t pronounce my name,” said Rangsim Tsojay.

Since 2003, the Society Switzerland-Bhutan has been sponsoring Bhutanese farmers to work and stay with Swiss farming families for three months. The objective is to encourage the farmers to pick up new skills and knowledge on crop, dairy and forestry production and processing. The farmers are selected by the dzongkhag based on their ability to speak English and their performance as farmers.

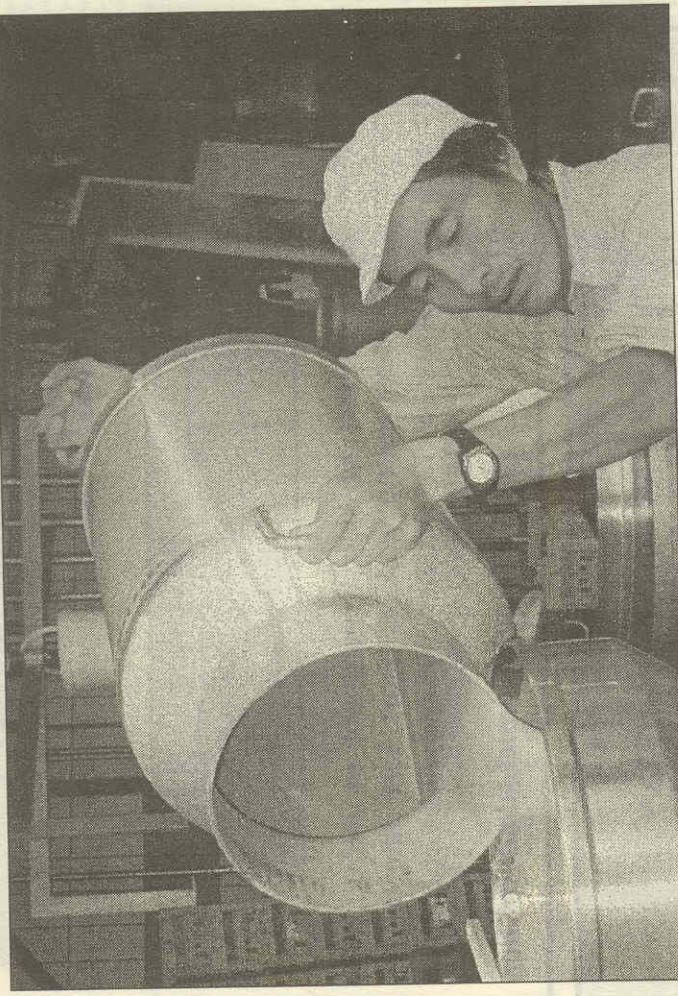
“The basic objectives of such training are to facilitate people to people contact between Bhutan and Switzerland. It gives exposures to our farmers so that they can learn more from developed countries like Switzerland,” said Namgyel Tshering of Helvatas.

The farmers say they learnt the Swiss way of making hay, mowing, weeding, planting, harvesting crops, and also processing different kinds of cheese and yoghurt with machines. They also observed and learnt ways and methods related to forestry.

“The cows are kept clean and fed well so that each cow gives 25 litres of milk a day. I learned how to use various farm machines and the various methods for enhancing the quality and quantity of the products,” said Rangsim Tsojay.

Besides farming, Rangsim has also become adept at bicycling.

He now dreams of creating a ‘Swiss Gar-



>> Rangsim Tsojay learns how to prepare yoghurt by using machines

den’ in Bhutan for the delight of Swiss visitors and to make them feel at home here.

“It will be a thanksgiving gesture for all that the Swiss, and for what the Bhutan-Switzerland Friendship Association has done for us,” said Rangsim.

Janchub worked the fields driving a tractor and harvester and also engaged in forestry, poultry and piggyery. “The Swiss people are very welcoming and friendly. They never made us feel like outsiders.

The Association took us to various zoos and places like the oldest oak forest in Switzerland,” he said. “They explained how to maintain and use the forests ecologically and sustainably.”

Namgyal Wangmo has six Brown Swiss cows, and she hopes to do better poultry and dairy farming with the knowledge she acquired from the trip. “The Swiss people are very hard-working, and their farms are beautiful. We were really inspired by their way of farming. Our Bhutanese farmers should learn from them,” she said.

The farmers say that while the methods used are similar, the big difference lies in mechanization and skill.

“We are very grateful to Mr. Ernst Reinhardt, Mr. Erich Oberholzer, Kinley Dorji, Aum Tshering and the Union for the tour which was very informative and exciting,” the three farmers told BT.