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# Fasting, Food, and Farming

Evidence from Ethiopian producers on the link of food taboos with dairy development

Eline D'Haene, Senne Vandevelde, and Bart Minten

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## ABSTRACT

The impact of food taboos – often because of religion – is understudied. In Ethiopia, religious fasting by Orthodox Christians is assumed to be an important impediment for the sustainable development of a competitive dairy sector and desired higher milk consumption, especially by children. However, evidence is limited. Relying on unique data, we shed light on three major issues. First, we observe that the average annual number of fasting days that Orthodox adults are effectively adhering to is 140, less than commonly cited averages. Using this as an estimate for extrapolation, fasting is estimated to reduce annual dairy consumption by approximately 12 percent nationally. Second, farms adapt to declining milk demand during fasting by increased processing of milk into storable products – fasting contributes to larger price swings for these products. We further note continued sales of milk by non-remote farmers and reduced production – by adjusting lactation times for dairy animals – for remote farmers. Third, fasting is mostly associated with increased milk consumption by the children of dairy farmers, seemingly because of excess milk availability during fasting periods. Our results suggest that fasting habits are not a major explanation for the observed poor performance of Ethiopia's dairy sector nor low milk consumption by children. To reduce the impact of fasting on the dairy sector in Ethiopia further, investment is called for in improved milk processing, storage, and infrastructure facilities.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Religious traditions are often reflected in food choices as various religious groups lay out food recommendations to their adherents (Norman 2012). Even if foods are available and accessible, individuals might not consume specific food items because of these traditions (Farouk et al. 2015). However, despite the growing share of religious people worldwide (Pew Research Center 2017a) and the acknowledged importance of religion in shaping the structure of institutions and markets (Iyer 2016), the role of religion in shaping food choices, nutrition, and food value chains is still not well understood (Heiman, Gordon, and Zilberman 2019).

Religious practices are especially prevalent for animal-source foods (ASF) (Meyer-Rochow 2009). The practice of fasting, in particular, might reduce ASF consumption in two ways. First, aggregate consumption levels might be directly affected as adherents are not allowed to consume ASF during fasting periods. Second, fasting might result in lower availability and higher pricing of ASF over the long term due to lower investments and broader value chain effects. This reduction is unfortunate, as there is a strong link between the consumption of ASF and improved nutritional outcomes (Leroy and Frongillo 2007; Randolph et al. 2007; Hoddinott, Headey, and Dereje 2015).

We study the effects of fasting practices, focusing on the case of dairy production and consumption in Ethiopia, the second most populous country in Africa. We assess the effects of seasonal fasting rituals embedded within the Ethiopian Orthodox community, the dominant religious group in the country. During several fasting periods annually, Orthodox members are to refrain from consuming ASF. Fasting (and associated feasts) occur at different times throughout the year thereby creating considerable demand swings for ASF. This makes Ethiopian diets not only susceptible to agroclimatic patterns, but also to the sequential cycle of religious fasting. Studying this issue in Ethiopia is an important topic given low overall consumption of milk (MoA and ILRI 2013), especially by children, and the potential prohibitive effects this has on investments in dairy production, possibly contributing to the underdevelopment of the country's dairy sector compared to other countries in the region (e.g. Tegegne et al. 2013; Van der Lee et al. 2018).

We focus in this analysis on three research questions in particular. First, we evaluate the number of effective fasting days adhered to by Orthodox members. Fasting periods differ in length and cover both one-day fasts and longer fasting periods (16 to 55 days). However, as not all Orthodox Christians adhere to all fasts, it is difficult to assess the exact influence of fasting on Ethiopia's dairy sector. Several estimates on the number of fasting days annually can be found in the literature, with ranges of from 166 to 180 days (Bachewe, Minten, and Yimer 2017; Abegaz, Hassen, and Minten 2018), and from 180 to 250 days (Francesconi, Heerink, and D'Haese 2010, MoA and ILRI 2013) being cited. With unique household member-specific fasting data at our disposal, we are able to evaluate effective fasting practices, as well as beliefs. This is important to better understand demand swings and their importance for dairy markets.

Second, we look at what the effects of these demand changes due to fasting are on the dairy value chain and, more specifically, which adaptation strategies milk producing households develop to overcome the effects of low demand during fasting periods. Existing – mostly qualitative – studies show important effects of fasting on the value chain. A reduced, or even a complete lack of, market access as well as lower dairy prices during fasting have been found at the farm level (ADP-LMDP 2013; Tegegne et al. 2013; Gizaw et al. 2016; Herego 2017). Processing companies apparently cut down their operations during fasting periods by limiting the supply of milk from producers using quota systems, paying lower prices, or requiring a higher milk quality (ADP-LMDP 2013; Zijlstra et al. 2015). There is, however, only limited quantitative evidence on the value chain effects of fasting

and on adjustments made by producing households. Moreover, no attention has been paid to differential effects by the degree of market access of milk producing households.

Third, we assess the impact of fasting practices on children's milk consumption. Previous studies have illustrated negative repercussions of fasting on dietary diversity and intake of ASF for children, who are, in principle, exempt from fasting (Kumera, Tsedal, and Ayana 2018; Desalegn et al. 2019). In contrast to previous studies, we test the impact of fasting on milk intake of children within milk producing households, who are less affected by availability issues. We do so by relying on detailed consumption data collected in a survey that was partly rolled out during and outside of a major fasting period.

Relying on a unique primary dataset with a large number of dairy producers, we find that the Orthodox adult fasts on average 140 days per year and that annual milk consumption at the national level is reduced by about 12 percent because of Orthodox fasting practices. While effects in specific periods and locations might obviously be higher, this result suggests that fasting is only a partial explanation for the low dairy consumption in Ethiopia. Moreover, we find that price effects of fasting on milk are much smaller than reported in other studies, although we observe larger price swings for processed milk products. Several adaptation strategies are followed by milk producing households to reduce the economic impact of declining dairy demand during fasting, including increased processing of milk into storable milk products, reduced production (by adjusting lactation times of dairy animals) for remote farmers, and continued sales of milk for farmers with good market access. Finally, despite some children being affected by fasting practices, their number is found to be small. Based on detailed milk consumption data, we find no significant declines in milk consumption for young children during fasting. Fasting is actually found to be beneficial for most young children in milk producing households. Excess milk increases in these producing households during fasting periods, hence improving its availability for consumption by children in the household.

Our findings have several important implications:

- First, as the impact of fasting at the national level is found to be relatively small and as we find that children consume milk when it is available, even in fasting periods, this suggests that other issues, such as availability and affordability, and not fasting, are the main impediments to increased dairy consumption. This finding is corroborated by the high income and price elasticities for dairy products (Abegaz, Hassen, and Minten 2018). Further investments to stimulate the dairy sector are therefore needed to increase availability of dairy products at lower prices. In contrast to the rapid growth in crop output and productivity recorded in Ethiopia over the past 20 years, ASF output has grown slowly and productivity has stagnated. This is seemingly due to low availability and adoption of improved inputs in the dairy sector leading to high and increasing prices for dairy products (Bachewe and Minten 2019).
- Second, we find that some young children participate in fasting, even if the share is relatively small. Further efforts in improved information dissemination on the potential adverse developmental effects of fasting on children is therefore needed.
- Third, to help smoothen the effect of seasonal demand swings and possibly increase returns to investments in the sector, further efforts are needed towards enhancing processing practices (such as ultra-heat treated (UHT) and powdered milk), ensuring greater availability of chilling centers, as well as improving market access and transportation facilities to assure market integration and allow marketing to areas where fasting is less prevalent.

## 2. BACKGROUND

Ethiopia hosts the largest Orthodox community outside Europe. In the last census in 2007, it was estimated that the community made up 43 percent of the total population in Ethiopia (CSA 2010). Besides Orthodox Christians, Ethiopia is also home to Muslims, Protestants, Catholics, and traditional faiths (CSA 2010).<sup>1</sup> Only the Orthodox and Islamic traditions prescribe fasting practices to their followers. While Islamic fasting is limited to the month of Ramadan, fasting in the Orthodox community entails abstinence from ASF during several official fasting periods, spread throughout the year. During those periods, no consumption of meat, eggs, or dairy products is allowed. Fasting periods consist of both one-day fasts and longer fasting seasons that often precede holy events. An overview of the fasting periods is given in Table 1.

**Table 1: Obligatory annual fasting events in the Ethiopia Orthodox Church**

Fasts	Timing
Advent fast	40 days, from November 28 to January 6
Epiphany fast	Fast on the eve of Epiphany
Nineveh fast	Three days (Monday to Wednesday), two weeks before the start of Lent
Lent fast (Easter fast)	55 days, starts on Monday, movable start (between February 8 and March 14)
Sene fast (Apostles' fast)	10 to 40 days, starts Monday after Pentecost and ends July 12
Felseta fast (Assumption fast)	15 days, from August 7 to August 21
Weekly fasting	Every Wednesday and Friday, except for period between Easter and Pentecost

Source: Compiled by authors, based on Knutsson and Selinus (1970), Ware (1997), Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (2003).

The sequential cycle of Orthodox fasting makes demand for ASF products to vary considerably in the country, as has been shown in a number of studies. Hirvonen, Taffesse, and Hassen (2015) found that diets are less diversified during the Orthodox Lent and Advent fasting periods, due to reduced intake of ASF, both for rural and urban households. Likewise, Abegaz, Hassen, and Minten (2018) mapped seasonal per capita consumption of ASF and observed that drops and peaks in intake overlap to a large extent with Orthodox fasting and feasts.

These demand swings caused by fasting affect all actors along the dairy value chain, i.e. retailers, processors, and producers. Many processors cut down their capacity during fasting periods, with reductions of 25 percent being reported (Land O'Lakes 2010). Moreover, they try to limit the supply of milk during fasting using quota systems, paying lower prices, or requiring a higher milk quality from their suppliers (Zijlstra et al. 2015). Some processors adapt during the fasting period by building up stocks of processed milk products that they can sell outside the fasting period, while others transport their products to areas where fasting is less prevalent (Land O'Lakes 2010). Since end consumers, retailers, and processors all limit the quantity of milk they purchase, fasting necessarily also affects the dairy farmers. Many farmers indicate a reduced or even a complete lack of market access, lower sales, reduced dairy prices, and increased processing of milk into less perishable products, like butter or cheese, during fasting (Tegegne et al. 2013; Makoni et al. 2014; Gizaw et al. 2016; Herego 2017).

Other studies have examined the specific impact of fasting on the milk intake of young children (Kumera, Tsedal, and Ayana 2018; Desalegn et al. 2019; Kim et al. 2019) and on lactating mothers (Desalegn et al. 2018) in Ethiopia. While pregnant and lactating women and children below the age of seven years in principle are exempt from fasting (Knutsson and Selinus 1970),<sup>2</sup> all of these studies found negative repercussions of Orthodox fasting practices on dietary diversity and intake of ASF. Desalegn et al. (2019) found that maternal fasting adherence influences children's dietary

<sup>1</sup> It has been noted that the Orthodox population in Ethiopia is more religiously observant compared to their European counterparts (Pew Research Center 2017b).

<sup>2</sup> Severely ill or weak persons also are not required to fast.

intake and nutritional status significantly, even outside of official fasting periods.<sup>3</sup> Kim et al. (2019), who studied ASF consumption by children aged 6 to 23 months during Lent, observed that only a quarter of surveyed children consume ASF during the Lent fasting period, even though 80 percent of the surveyed households reported owning livestock. They found that caregivers are reluctant to feed ASF to their children during Lent, even when livestock products are available, because they fear the disapproval of their neighbors or the contamination of cooking utensils with non-fasting foods.

These trends are worrisome given low dietary diversity and low ASF consumption in Ethiopia, even outside of fasting periods. According to the 2016 Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey, only 14 percent of the children aged 6 to 23 months received diets that met the recommended minimum dietary diversity score. Children under the age of two years consume little meat, fish, or poultry: only 8 percent for breastfeeding children and 14 percent for non-breastfeeding children. Although milk intake is somewhat higher, it is still low at 13 percent and 24 percent, respectively (CSA and ICF 2016). The low inclusion of ASF in children's diets is believed to be an important driver of the high prevalence of malnutrition in sub-Saharan Africa (Willett et al. 2019). Yet, it has been shown that household cow ownership increases children's milk consumption and promotes linear growth and reduces stunting in young children, especially so in rural areas with thin dairy markets (Hoddinott, Headey, and Dereje 2015).

These studies demonstrate how Orthodox fasting practices might affect consumption and value chains of ASF. Yet, quantitative analyses of these effects remain limited – a research gap we address here.

### 3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To conceptualize the impacts of fasting, we rely on a simple demand and supply framework. We first look at the results of a one-commodity analysis and then expand this to two commodities, allowing for the possibility of processing liquid milk into butter.

In a one-commodity framework (liquid milk), prices and quantity consumed meet at an equilibrium price ( $P_{NF}$ ) and quantity ( $Q_{NF}$ ) during non-fasting periods (Figure 1, left side). Abstinence from dairy products by some people in Ethiopia during the fasting period leads to a shift downward from  $D_{NF}$  to  $D_F$  in the overall demand curve for milk. If supply stays constant, prices of milk will drop to  $P_F$ , and it will therefore become more accessible for those people that do not fast. For the latter group, consumption might therefore go up during the period of fasting. It is also possible that supply is adjusted down with the decline in demand during fasting periods, since lactation periods in dairy animals can be planned. In that case, the price declines associated with fasting periods might be smaller. However, as lactation periods cannot easily be adjusted for relatively short fasting periods, such effects will likely be relatively small and will only exist for longer fasts. Effects of fasting on prices and quantities consumed will depend on respective demand and supply elasticities as well as the share of the population that is affected by fasting, as that will affect the size of the shift.

If a second commodity is brought into the analysis and we allow for the fact that milk can be transformed to a storable product, e.g., butter, fasting might lead to a number of different effects in the milk and butter markets. This situation is visualized by red supply curves in Figure 1. In this case, on top of demand shifts, there is a shift in the supply curve of liquid milk – from  $S_{NF}$  to  $S'_F$  – as well. While consumption is significantly reduced, price effects are much smaller as seen in the smaller differences between ( $P_{NF}-P'_F$ ) than ( $P_{NF}-P_F$ ). On the other hand, effects of fasting in the butter market will be magnified. We see a supply shift to the right because of the extra processing of

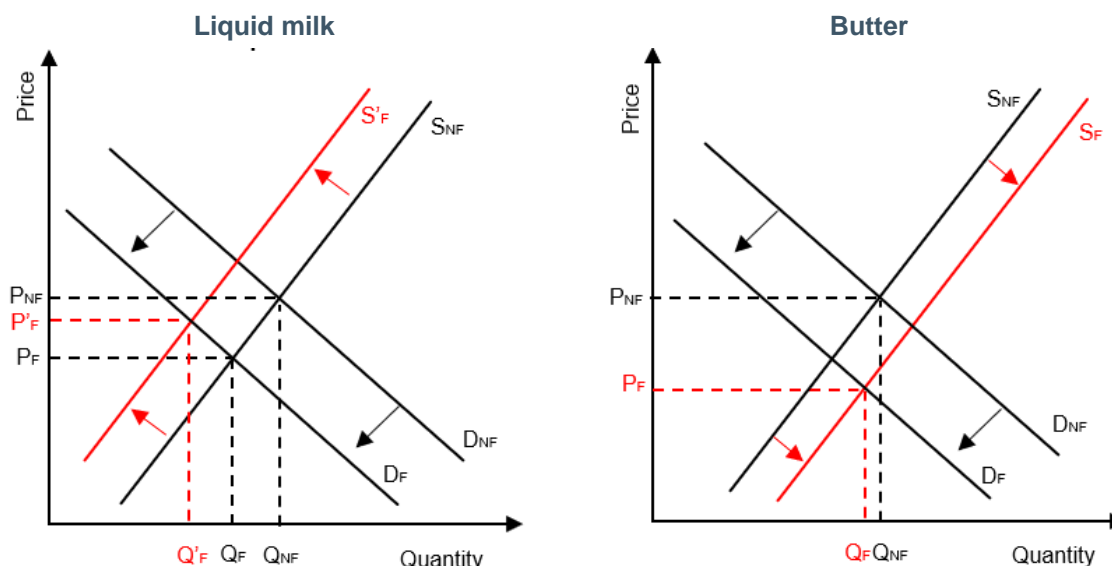
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<sup>3</sup> A recent study by Potts, Mulugeta, and Bazzano (2019) found that Muslim children had a higher probability (20 percent) of having consumed ASF as compared to children from Orthodox households and households adhering to other religions.



liquid milk into butter during fasting. As the demand for this commodity is also affected by fasting habits, we further see a shift of the demand curve downwards, putting extra downward pressure on butter prices, which are reduced from  $P_{NF}$  to  $P_F$ , even without large changes in quantities consumed ( $Q_{NF}-Q_F$ ).

**Figure 1: Demand and supply framework illustrating the impact of fasting on the liquid milk and butter markets**



Source: Compiled by authors.

These simple diagrams give an indication of the forces at play in dairy markets because of fasting. The expected downward pressure on prices in butter markets is partly explained by opportunity costs for the storage of butter and should in more complete models be addressed by more sophisticated models that incorporate the costs of processing and storage (e.g., Williams and Wright 2005). Other adaptation methods and processing possibilities for milk should be considered as well. However, these considerations are beyond the scope of this analysis.

The purpose of this simple conceptual framework is to help set the stage for expected results of our analysis. First, we expect that dairy consumption by those not affected by fasting will go up because of price decreases. Second, milk production will go down during (longer) fasts. Third, price swings will be larger for storable dairy commodities than for liquid milk as storable products will be affected by supply increases on top of demand decreases. Finally, the predicted effects all depend on the magnitude of fasting adherence by the population at large and on the level of market integration, as they determine the size of these demand shifts.

## 4. DATA AND EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

We use unique primary data collected with the aim of mapping the supply chain of dairy products to Ethiopia's capital city, Addis Ababa, the most developed milk shed within the country. We surveyed 870 milk producing households with at least one cow in milk located in and around Addis Ababa (30 urban, 240 suburban, and 600 rural producers). Data collection took place between 22 January and 15 February 2018.

This paper looks at three research questions, as indicated in the introduction. It is important to keep in mind that 85 percent of the surveyed households reported being Orthodox Christian. The other surveyed households reported being Protestant (12 percent), Muslim (2 percent), Catholic (1 percent) or indicated that they adhere to other religious beliefs, e.g., traditional faiths (1 percent). To answer our first research question on effective fasting participation, we only examine data

obtained from Orthodox households in our sample. For the remaining research questions on production adaptations and consumption, our analytical sample is made up of both Orthodox and non-Orthodox households. In our regressions for these research questions, we include controls for religious affiliation of the household.

Our first study question is to assess the effective number of days annually that members of Orthodox households fast. To do so, we asked respondents (usually the household head) in Orthodox households to indicate for each household member above the age of five years whether or not this member observes any Orthodox fasting event. If a member was said to engage in fasting, we detailed for each of the seven major fasts, as outlined in Table 1, a member's observance with a dummy variable (yes/no). If a member participates in a particular fasting event, we assume that this member fasts during the entire prescribed fasting period. This method provides us with fasting data on 3,946 individuals. We extend this analysis by investigating the factors associated with fasting participation. To do so, we run a random and household-level fixed effect logit regression.

Second, to detail the impact of fasting on the value chain, we look both at the adaptation strategies of milk producers and at dairy prices. We start by analyzing the different strategies used by farmers to deal with fasting by looking at the impact fasting has on their milk production and the different milk output uses they adopt.

We further explore potential heterogeneity in adopted adaptation strategies, specifically that dependent upon the household's degree of market access. We proxy market accessibility by remoteness to Addis Ababa,<sup>4</sup> assuming that households located closer to the capital have better market access. We therefore categorize farmers in two groups, remote and non-remote, using the median of 1.54 hours travel time to Addis Ababa as a cut-off between the two groups.<sup>5</sup>

To appraise price effects linked with fasting, we use market prices reported by our participants over the 12 months preceding the survey. We further detail the effect of remoteness on seasonal price swings caused by fasting. We do so by using the reported prices that farmers obtained for dairy products that they sold in the middle of the most recent long fasting season and two weeks after this fasting season, when they had cows in milk. To assess these impacts of fasting, we run fixed effect regression models at the household level, splitting the data between remote and non-remote milk producing households, following the definition mentioned above.

Finally, we assess the impact of fasting on dairy intake of the household as a whole and the youngest child aged five years and under separately.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, we test with detailed data what was consumed by the youngest child in the day before the survey and how this is affected by the fasting observance of the household head. Fasting observance is self-reported and equaled one if the household head indicated to have fasted the day before the survey. We again look at heterogeneity in these effects linked to market access.

To assess the impact of fasting on producer adaptation strategies and consumption, we use Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) and Tobit regressions. Using the time variation of our interview period (Table 2), we were able to develop two fasting indicators for each household surveyed, based on the number of consecutive official fasting days in the week and in the month prior to the interview. These fasting indicators are calculated using the official fasting calendar (as reflected in Table 1). We calculate these indicators on a weekly and monthly basis to accommodate the fact

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<sup>4</sup> The variable is defined and calculated in line with Vandecasteele et al. (2018) using the Ethiopian road network and quality data (obtained from the Ethiopian Road Authority) combined with the farmer's self-reported travel time to the nearest road segment. The obtained measure thus captures the travel time (expressed in hours) from the farm's location to Ethiopia's capital city.

<sup>5</sup> When looking at the religious composition of both groups, we find that 80 percent of the remote farmers affiliate to the Ethiopia Orthodox Church and 16 percent reported to be Protestant. A somewhat higher share of non-remote farmers reported to be Orthodox Christians (90 percent), while 8 percent reported to be Protestant.

<sup>6</sup> Out of the 870 surveyed households, 310 had a child below the age of five years. 86 percent of these children are members of an Orthodox household, while 12 percent are part of a Protestant household.

that outcome variables are based on either weekly (consumption) or monthly (production and output use) recall periods.

**Table 2: Timing of fasting periods and data collection, 2017 and 2018**

Dates:	28 Nov to 06 Jan	07 Jan to 21 Jan	22 Jan to 28 Jan	29 Jan to 31 Jan	01 Feb to 11 Feb	12 Feb to 25 Feb	26 Feb to 07 Apr
Fasting period	Advent	Weekly only	Weekly only	Nineveh	Weekly only	Lent	Lent
Data collection period							

Source: Compiled by authors.

For both fasting indicators, a cut-off is chosen to distinguish between short and long fasting episodes. The cut-off is set at the average amount of consecutive fasting days, which for the weekly and monthly fasting indicator amounts to 4 days (varying between 1 and 7 days) and 10 days (varying between 3 and 17 days), respectively (Table 3). By dividing the sample in this way, we construct a treatment variable where the treatment equates the presence of a long fasting period in the past week or past month. In our sample, 31 and 60 percent of households were confronted with a long fasting period in the last week and month, respectively. The difference in likelihood of treatment between both fasting indicators can be explained by the presence of the Advent fasting period, which is covered in the monthly fasting indicator, but not in the weekly indicator.

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics of constructed fasting indicators**

Variable	Unit	Mean (standard deviation)
Consecutive fasting days in week prior to the interview	number (1 to 7)	3.09 (2.48)
Weekly fasting indicator	0/1	0.31
Consecutive fasting days in month prior to interview	number (3 to 17)	9.44 (3.71)
Monthly fasting indicator	0/1	0.60
Observations		870

Source: Compiled by authors.

Besides these main explanatory variables, we also included household and individual variables outlined in Appendix Table A1 as controls. Regressing the fasting indicators on all covariates, using an F-test, revealed that neither of the two treatment variables withstands a joint orthogonality test. It shows, for example, that the variation in the sample across space (remoteness) is related to the variation across time (fasting indicators) in a non-random way. The controls include household socio-demographic characteristics, as well as controls related to dairy production and marketing. We also control for within-sample concentrations of different religions in the village where a household resides. We assume that religious diversity in the immediate vicinity of a household, and particularly the concentration of Orthodox followers, may impact milk production and milk output use decisions. Finally, we include a series of individual control variables specifically related to the milk intake of children. In all regressions, standard errors are clustered at the village level.

Descriptive statistics of the dependent variables used in the OLS and Tobit regressions are summarized in Table 4. Average daily milk production in our sample is 3 liters per cow, of which 55 percent is processed into cheese, butter, or buttermilk, 25 percent is sold, 19 percent is used for own consumption, and a minor share (0.5 percent) is given away. Sales volumes vary considerably for all dairy products, driven in part by the fact that an important share (35 percent) of the dairy producers does not sell any dairy products.<sup>7</sup> Still, it can be observed that producers specialize in liquid milk sales, with processing at the farm level mainly intended for own consumption. Dairy products consumed within the households are almost exclusively sourced from own production (99.8 percent on average across all dairy products).

<sup>7</sup> We did not consider the sales of buttermilk, since buttermilk is usually not sold in the market.

We collected separate milk intake data for the youngest child below the age of five years in each surveyed household. Average household milk intake fluctuates around 3 liters, of which the youngest child consumes on average 2 liters. Our data thus confirm that young children are prioritized when it comes to milk consumption, in line with the prevailing assumption in Ethiopia that milk is mainly meant for children (Kitaw et al. 2012).<sup>8,9</sup>

**Table 4: Descriptive statistics of outcome variables used in analysis of milk producer adaptation strategies and consumption**

Variable	Unit	Household	Youngest child
<b>Past month</b>			
Milk production	l/cow/day	2.95 (3.85)	
Share milk home processed	%	55.0 (37.8)	
Share milk sold	%	25.6 (40.3)	
Share milk home consumed	%	18.8 (21.7)	
Share milk given out	%	0.5 (3.6)	
<b>Sales quantities past month</b>			
Milk	l	123.9 (351.7)	
Butter	kg	1.1 (2.9)	
Cheese	kg	7.9 (31.2)	
<b>Past week</b>			
<b>Dairy consumption</b>			
Milk	l	3.16 (4.44)	2.04 (2.67)
Buttermilk	l	1.70 (3.30)	0.40 (1.09)
Butter	l eq. <sup>a</sup>	2.16 (5.79)	
Cheese	l eq. <sup>a</sup>	1.64 (3.57)	
Observations		870	317

Source: Compiled by authors.

Notes: Means are shown with standard deviations in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup> For comparison purposes, kilogram (kg) amounts of processed products are transformed into liter (l) of milk equivalents. The conversion rates used are 20 l/kg for butter and 1.33 l/kg for cheese.

## 5. FASTING PARTICIPATION AND BELIEFS

Table 5 summarizes the extent of participation in fasting periods throughout the year for Orthodox households. The number of fasting days on a yearly basis varies from 5.2 days for young children to 142 days for elderly people. The fasting adherence of adults is around 140 days and thus 26 to 110 days below the estimates of 166 to 250 fasting days per year reported elsewhere (Francesconi, Heerink, and D'Haese 2010; Bachewe, Minten, and Yimer 2017; Abegaz, Hassen, and Minten 2018). It is also to be noted that between 11 and 12 percent of Orthodox adults do not participate in any fast, possibly because of pregnancy or illness, but possibly out of choice. Furthermore, fasting adherence increases with age. Average participation among older children, who are supposed to participate in fasting periods, is rather low with about one-in-five participating. Adolescents fast more commonly, 65 percent on average, while observance reaches 90 percent among adults and the elderly.

<sup>8</sup> Wastage of milk and related products is not really an issue in our sample. A study by Minten, Tamru, and Reardon (2019), using the same producer data as this paper, assessed that the percentage of all produced milk spoiled at farm level was as little as 0.003 to 0.008 percent.

<sup>9</sup> Buttermilk, on the other hand, is mostly consumed by other household members, mostly women and elderly (Gonfa, Foster, and Holzapfel 2001).

**Table 5: Participation rates and fasting days per age group for members of the Orthodox faith in survey sample**

	Observations	Participate in any fasting, percent	Number of fasting days	
			Average	Standard deviation
Young children (5 to 6 years old)	161	5.0	5.2	29.52
Older children (7 to 9)	356	22.7	34.1	65.97
Adolescents (10 to 19)	1,496	64.5	98.4	77.63
Adults (20 to 64)	1,744	88.5	140.4	57.91
Elderly (65+)	189	89.4	141.6	56.86

Source: Compiled by authors.

Only a small proportion of young children participates in fasting rituals, although they are in principle exempt from fasting. Among Orthodox surveyed households, we asked opinions about fasting observance by young children. Only 11 percent of the households disagreed or strongly disagreed that children less than 2 years old should not observe fasting. Four percent believed that children aged 6 to 23 months should stop eating ASF during fasting; 6 percent argued that these children should eat less frequently during fasting; and 5 percent thought these children should be breastfed less during fasting. In general, Orthodox households in our sample stated that children should start observing fasting at the age of 9.2 years (with a 95 percent confidence interval of 8.6 to 9.7 years old). While these findings are lower than those reported by Kim et al. (2019), who find that only half of caregivers had positive attitudes towards the exemption of children from fasting practices, it is still worrisome to find in our data that a number of young children are actively participating or are expected to participate in fasting.

To understand factors associated with fasting participation, we run a random and household-level fixed effect logit regression. A number of interesting results show up from that exercise (Table 6). First, participation rates differ greatly across the different fasting events. We observe that Lent, Felseta fast, and the weekly fasting days are the most adhered to, followed, at some distance, by the Nineveh and the Advent fasts. Second, women participate significantly less in fasting events than men. Third, as noted earlier, we also see strong associations with age. Finally, we note that household head controls, household size, and household income have no significant association with fasting participation. We do however observe significantly more fasting participation the farther that the household is located from Addis Ababa, whereas an increased concentration of Orthodox households at the village level significantly reduces fasting participation.

The results indicate that fasting is widespread in the Orthodox community, but that there is also significant heterogeneity in fasting adherence. Using these data, we calculate that annual milk consumption at the national level is reduced by about 12 percent because of Orthodox fasting practices – this calculation is based on 43 percent of the population being Orthodox (CSA 2010); 38 percent of all days being fasting days (140 days out of 365); and children below 10 years of age, who represent 28 percent of the Orthodox population, being exempt from fasting.<sup>10</sup> While the effects of fasting on milk consumption in specific periods and locations might obviously be higher, this result suggests that fasting is only a partial explanation for low dairy consumption in the country. We now look at milk producer adaptation strategies, pricing effects, and consumption changes because of this fasting practice.

<sup>10</sup> We further assume no difference in consumption between Orthodox and non-Orthodox population and between children below 10 and others during non-fasting days. These estimates can obviously be improved, but the purpose of the exercise is only to give an idea on the order of magnitude.

**Table 6: Factors associated with fasting participation**

	Unit	Random effect		Fixed effect	
		Coefficient (S.E.)	z-value	Coefficient (S.E.)	z-value
<b>Fasting events</b>					
Advent fast	0/1	-4.64 (0.20)	-23.76	-4.36 (0.19)	-22.90
Lent fast	0/1	-1.27 (0.21)	-6.03	-1.21 (0.21)	-5.90
Nineveh fast	0/1	-4.14 (0.19)	-21.28	-3.90 (0.19)	-20.53
Sene fast	0/1	-6.04 (0.20)	-30.29	-5.69 (0.19)	-29.29
Felseta fast	0/1	-1.27 (0.21)	-6.03	-1.32 (0.20)	-6.45
Epiphany fast	0/1	-7.61 (0.21)	-36.19	-7.41 (0.21)	-35.80
Weekly fasting	0/1	Omitted		Omitted	
<b>Individual controls</b>					
Sex: female	0/1	-0.16 (0.06)	-2.55	-0.14 (0.06)	-2.31
<b>Age</b>					
5 to 6 years	0/1	-3.97 (1.14)	-3.47	-4.96 (1.14)	-4.34
7 to 9	0/1	2.48 (0.93)	2.67	2.24 (0.91)	2.47
10 to 19	0/1	2.86 (0.92)	3.11	2.64 (0.89)	2.97
20 to 64	0/1	3.28 (0.92)	3.57	3.06 (0.89)	3.44
65+	0/1	3.59 (0.93)	3.88	3.38 (0.90)	3.76
Schooling	years	0.01 (0.01)	0.55	0.00 (0.01)	0.38
<b>Household head controls</b>					
Sex: female	0/1	-0.57 (0.55)	-1.04		
Age	years	0.02 (0.01)	1.51		
Schooling	years	0.04 (0.04)	1.18		
<b>Household controls</b>					
Household size	#	0.04 (0.07)	0.57		
Total income	'000 ETB/month	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.19		
Orthodox concentration	%	-3.19 (0.97)	-3.29		
Remoteness	hours	0.25 (0.11)	2.19		
Observations			19,306		12,642
Chi-squared			2,915.26		6,986.12

Source: Analysis by authors.

## 6. FASTING, ADAPTATION STRATEGIES, AND DAIRY PRICES

### Fasting and producer adaptation strategies

In this section, we look at different adaptation strategies developed by milk producing households (both Orthodox and non-Orthodox) to manage the reduced demand for liquid milk during fasting periods. We first look at production and output use. We find that long fasting periods reduce daily milk production by one-fourth on average (Table 7). This suggests that farmers are aligning their production with fasting periods, especially since part of the data collection period coincided with the Advent fasting, a period during which milk output should be at its highest level (see Appendix B). This confirms the predicted effect from the conceptual model in Section 3.

Furthermore, we observe that long fasting seasons reduce marketing possibilities, with especially milk sales dropping significantly (Table 7). Farmers turn the milk that is not sold into dairy products with a longer shelf life, processing up to 60 percent of their milk output during long fasts. The share of consumption does not change with the presence of long fasting periods, which translates into lower absolute levels of consumption given the decrease in milk production (for more detail, see Table 11). We further observe no change in the already low share of milk being given away. As we have no reliable estimates of wastage of milk, it is possible that a large part of the remaining milk is thrown away during fasting periods.

**Table 7: Effect of presence of a long fasting season in the past month on milk production and output use one month prior to interview**

	Milk production and output use last month				
	Milk production (l/day)	Milk sold (%)	Milk processed (%)	Milk consumed (%)	Milk given away (%)
Fasting past month (0/1)	-1.67*	-49.89***	21.33***	-1.33	-3.35
	(0.99)	(14.67)	(7.25)	(2.19)	(9.00)
Model employed	OLS	Tobit	Tobit	Tobit	Tobit
Household controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Non-fasting mean	7.03	40.44	41.66	17.40	0.50
Observations	855	855	855	855	855
R-squared	0.72	0.17	0.06	0.02	0.05

Source: Analysis by authors.

Notes: See Appendix Table A1 for a complete list of controls. Total dairy production is not included as a control variable. Cluster robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.10.

In further analysis (not reported), it was found that the increased proportion of milk being processed during fasting is especially transformed into cheese. The production of other processed products does not change significantly. Regarding sales volumes, we find that milk sales are significantly affected by long fasting periods, being reduced on average by 28 percent (Table 8). This means that the cheese produced during long fasting periods is most likely not sold immediately but stored for sale or consumption after the fasting period. Milk sales do not completely drop to zero, since some milk buyers continue purchasing milk during Orthodox fasting. This is the case for about 18 percent of the farmers in our sample.<sup>11</sup> Running a robustness check (Appendix C), we find that long fasting periods affect the decision to sell milk, but not sales volumes conditional on a farmer selling milk during a fast.

**Table 8: Effect of the presence of a long fasting season in the last month on total dairy sales one month prior to the interview**

	Total monthly dairy sales last month		
	Milk (l)	Butter (kg)	Cheese (kg)
Fasting past month (0/1)	-48.09*	0.58	3.91
	(24.70)	(0.36)	(3.47)
Model employed	OLS	OLS	OLS
Household controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Non-fasting mean	173.35	0.70	5.37
Observations	855	855	855
R-squared	0.77	0.24	0.25

Source: Analysis by authors.

Notes: See Appendix Table A1 for complete list of controls. Cluster robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.10.

We further assess heterogeneity of adaptation strategies with respect to remoteness (Table 9). We find that remote households have predominantly adapted to a culture of fasting by reducing their milk production, with total milk output falling by 60 percent during long fasting periods. Non-remote households, on the other hand, seem to have better access to buyers who continue purchasing milk during fasting, which enables them to maintain their milk production. However, we observe a slightly negative, yet not significant, trend in total milk output in these non-remote households. But, we find considerable heterogeneity in their ability to sell milk during fasting seasons and overall it seems that milk sales volumes tend to go down slightly. Milk sales of remote farmers, on the other hand, drop significantly (80 percent). As a result, both remote and non-remote households rely on

<sup>11</sup> Anecdotal evidence suggests that some buyers keep on buying milk, although they do not need nor use this milk but rather throw it away afterwards (van der Valk and Tessema 2010). Continuing buying milk during Orthodox fasting seasons seemingly helps buyers to assure supply from dairy producers in the non-fasting periods.

processing to overcome Orthodox fasting events. For neither remote nor non-remote households, however, do sales of processed milk products increase during long fasting periods.

**Table 9: Heterogeneity in milk production and output use adaptation strategies by remoteness to Addis Ababa**

	Milk production and output use last month							
	Milk production (l/day)		Processing (%)		Milk sales (l)		Processed sales (kg)	
	Remote	Not Remote	Remote	Not Remote	Remote	Not Remote	Remote	Not Remote
Fasting past month (0/1)	-1.38**	-1.45	11.12	29.42***	-36.76**	-37.69	3.76	3.53
	(0.64)	(1.35)	(7.26)	(7.95)	(17.79)	(31.80)	(4.81)	(3.00)
Model employed	OLS	OLS	Tobit	Tobit	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Household controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Non-fasting mean	2.32	10.42	63.30	26.06	46.12	265.14	7.41	5.10
Observations	427	428	427	428	427	428	427	428
R-squared	0.36	0.76	0.02	0.07	0.29	0.86	0.60	0.16

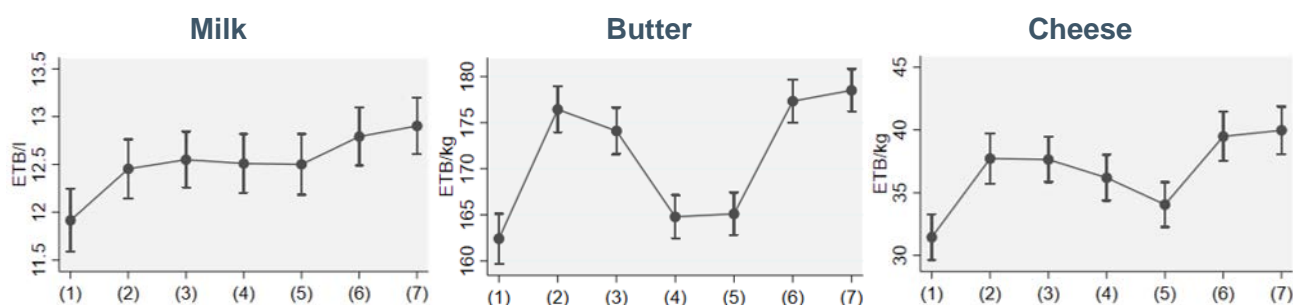
Source: Analysis by authors.

Notes: Remote / Not remote = Below / Above median travel time to Addis Ababa (1.54 hours). Notes: See Appendix Table A1 for a complete list of controls. Remoteness and access to the Addis market are not included as control variables and neither is total production for the regressions where milk production and share of processing are the dependent variables. Cluster robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.10.

## Fasting and dairy prices

Looking at price effects linked with fasting, we find that prices for different dairy products are low during periods of abundant supply (from June until the end of the year) and low demand (the Advent and Lent fasting periods). Conversely, prices are at their highest level when high demand, such as for feasts like Christmas and Easter, interacts with a declining availability of dairy products, such as in January and February (see Appendix Figure B1). Figure 2 also shows that price fluctuations are most pronounced for processed milk products, while milk prices seem to be barely affected by seasonality in supply or demand, although milk prices are slightly lower during Lent. Similar seasonal price variations for dairy products are reported by Bachewe, Minten, and Yimer (2017). These results therefore confirm the predicted effect from the conceptual model in Section 3.

**Figure 2: Average market prices of different dairy products throughout the year**



(1) Lent; (2) Easter; (3) Easter-May; (4) Jun-Advent; (5) Advent; (6) Christmas; (7) Christmas-current

Source: Analysis by authors.

Note: ETB = Ethiopian Birr. At the time of the survey: 1 USD = 27 ETB. Whisker-plots around points are 95-percent confidence intervals.

We further look at the effect of remoteness of farmers on seasonal price swings (Table 10). We continue to see with these data lower price swings during the fasting seasons for liquid milk compared to processed milk products. While fasting leads to a price reduction of 3 to 5 percent for liquid milk, this is as high as 7 to 8 percent for butter, and 18 percent for cheese. We also note that for milk there are higher price differences for remote areas compared to non-remote areas. This indicates the importance of access to markets for highly perishable milk to reduce price volatility



because of fasting. The limited effect of fasting on liquid milk prices seems to suggest that the magnitude of demand and supply shifts caused by fasting is almost equal for liquid milk, at least based on our data.

**Table 10: Fixed effects analysis of heterogeneity in price differences by remoteness relative to Addis Ababa**

	Dairy prices					
	Milk (ETB/liter)		Butter (ETB/kg)		Cheese (ETB/kg)	
	Remote	Not Remote	Remote	Not Remote	Remote	Not Remote
Fasting past month (0/1)	-0.56*** (0.12)	-0.40*** (0.10)	-12.24*** (1.62)	-13.69*** (1.40)	-5.94*** (0.58)	-8.09*** (1.00)
Non-fasting mean	10.96	13.37	168.42	175.70	32.49	44.58
Observations	60	234	305	183	118	151

Source: Analysis by authors.

Notes: Remote / not remote = below / above median travel time to Addis Ababa (1.54 hours). \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.10.

## 7. FASTING AND CONSUMPTION

Finally, we take a closer look at the impact of fasting on dairy consumption with detailed data at household level and for children below the age of five years. If there was a long fasting event in the week prior to the interview, households' dairy consumption decreases, but only significantly so in the case of butter, with intake almost cut by half (Table 11). Such drops are expected, since the majority of producing households (85 percent) are Orthodox Christian (Appendix Table A1). The limited impact of fasting on weekly dairy consumption could indicate that adult household members compensate for the forgone consumption of dairy, as well as other ASF, during non-fasting days. Strikingly, it appears that households' milk consumption during long fasting episodes would be even lower, were it not for the fact that the youngest children are given considerably more milk with each extra fasting day. Their milk consumption doubles during long fasting periods – they consume on average one extra liter of milk. This is in line with the predictions in the conceptual model.

**Table 11: Effect of the presence of a long fasting period of more than four days in the last week on dairy consumption one week prior to the interview**

	Milk household (l/ad.eq.)	Butter household (l/ad.eq.)	Cheese household (l/ad.eq.)	Buttermilk household (l/ad.eq.)	Milk youngest child (l)
Fasting past month (0/1)	-0.14 (0.10)	-0.19** (0.07)	-0.13 (0.09)	-0.06 (0.06)	0.95*** (0.33)
Model employed	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Individual controls	No	No	No	No	Yes
Household controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Non-fasting mean	0.64	0.41	0.34	0.43	1.76
Observations	848	849	841	847	267
R-squared	0.15	0.12	0.11	0.30	0.23

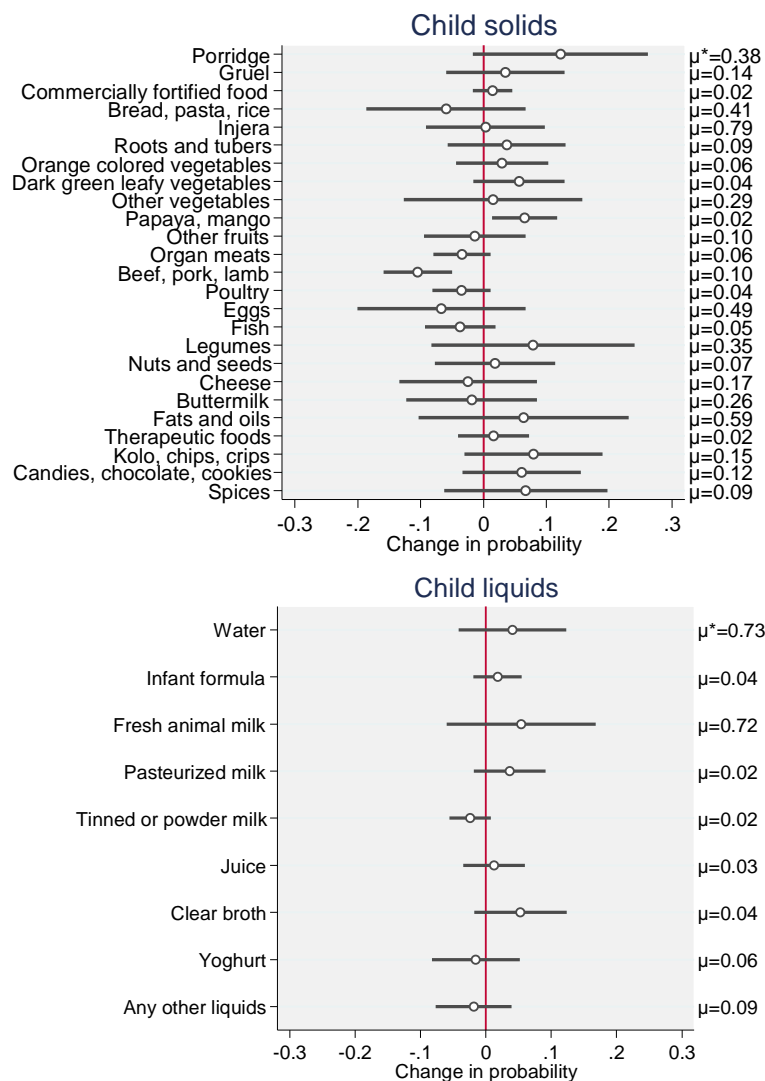
Source: Analysis by authors.

Notes: Household amounts are expressed per adult equivalent to account for household size and composition. For complete list of controls, see Appendix Table A1. Cluster robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

For children aged five years and below, we test with detailed data what was consumed in the day before the survey (Figure 3). Most of the children consume milk (72 percent) while the consumption of pasteurized milk and powder milk is limited (2 percent). This is not surprising given the availability of fresh milk in these producing households. Children do consume cheese and butter, although the likelihood is much lower as compared to milk (20 to 25 percent). The probability

of consuming other ASF, such as meat, fish, or yoghurt, is below 10 percent, except for eggs at around 50 percent. We find that a single fasting day does not impact negatively on their overall intake of dairy products. If anything, we see an increase in consumption of milk by children during fasting days, although this increase is not significant at conventional statistical levels. But, we observe that children consume less beef, pork, and lamb on fasting days, probably because these food items are less likely to be consumed and prepared at the household level during fasts.

**Figure 3. Impact of a fasting day on the likelihood of daily consumption of different food groups**



Source: Analysis by authors.

Notes:  $\mu^*$  denotes the non-fasting mean of the dependent variable. Coefficients of the fasting day indicator are shown along with cluster robust 95-percent confidence intervals.

One of the strategies that households have developed to overcome long Orthodox fasting periods is, thus, to allocate part of the surplus milk to their young children. These findings are different from those reported by Kim et al. (2019) who observed that, even in a setting where 80 percent of the interviewed households own livestock, only 25 percent of children consume any ASF during the Lent fasting period. An important reason for the increased consumption of milk by children that we observed seems to be the increased transaction costs to market milk during fasts. Marketing opportunities for milk drop significantly during fasting (Table 8) with buyers purchasing less or no milk during these periods. This increases transaction costs dramatically if farmers would want to search for alternative buyers to whom they could sell their milk. Since market prices of milk decrease during fasting (Table 10), a preferred option for farmers might be to channel part of the non-sold milk to their children. Of course, there is a limit to how much milk young children can

consume. In our data, there appears to be an upper limit of about 7 liters per week for the youngest child. This implies that even during long fasting periods, allocating more milk to children can only partly solve the excess milk supply problem.

We also test heterogeneity in consumption with respect to remoteness (Table 12). There is large variability in milk consumption patterns among the non-remote households with some households consuming more and others consuming less milk during fasting periods. Remote households on the other hand, significantly reduce the amount of milk and processed milk products consumed during fasting. This could potentially be explained by differences in strictness to fasting adherences of remote and non-remote households, as is suggested by the results in Table 6. Yet, both types of households allocate more milk to children during fasting, significantly so among non-remote households.

**Table 12: Heterogeneity in consumption adaptation strategies by remoteness to Addis Ababa**

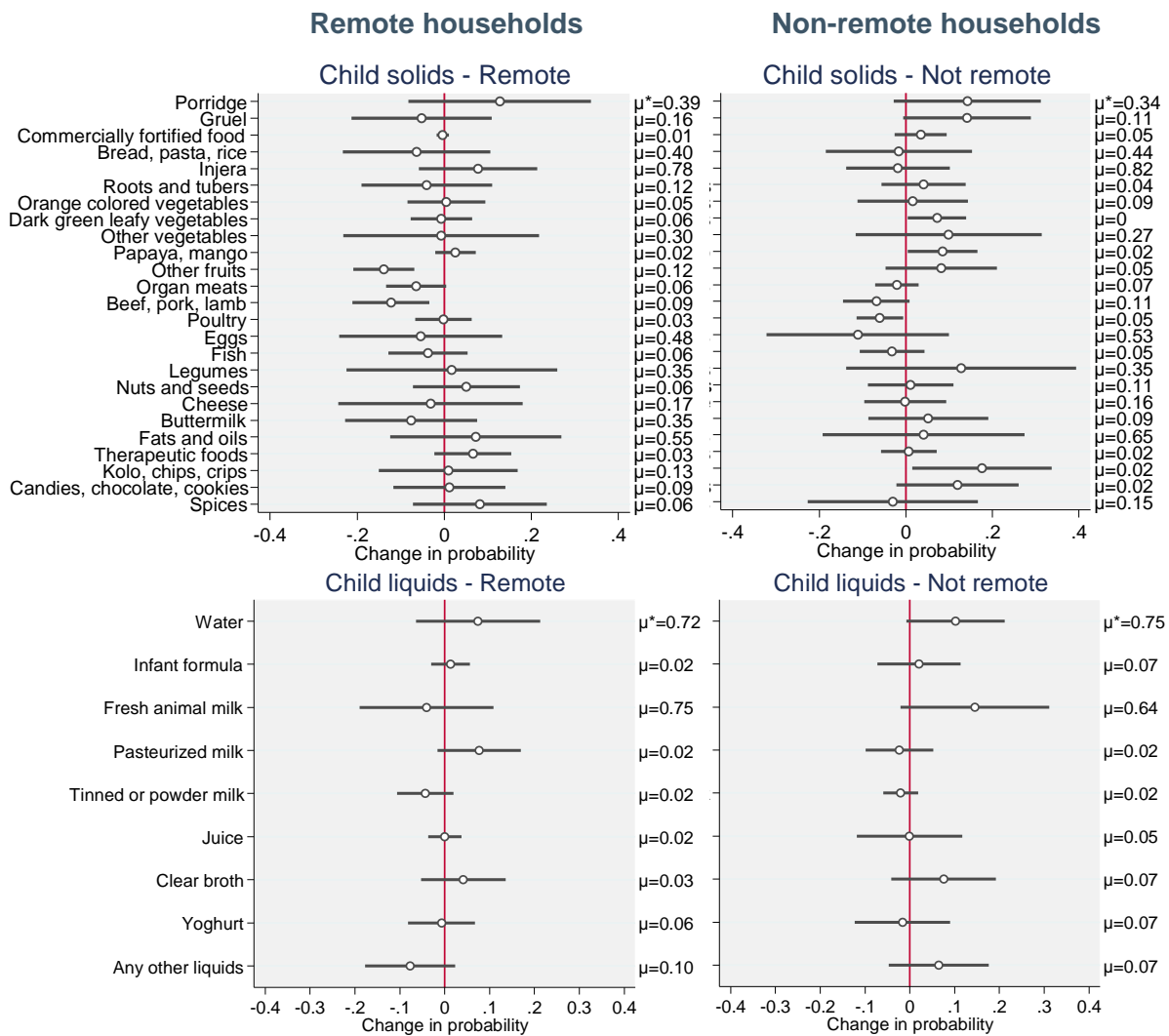
	Dairy consumption last week					
	Milk household (l/ad.eq.)		Processed household (l/ad.eq.)		Milk child (l)	
	Remote	Not Remote	Remote	Not Remote	Remote	Not Remote
Fasting past month (0/1)	-0.24*** (0.09)	-0.07 (0.14)	-0.64*** (0.17)	-0.25 (0.19)	0.81 (0.86)	0.96** (0.36)
Model employed	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS	OLS
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Household controls	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Non-fasting mean	0.57	0.78	1.33	0.85	1.59	2.11
Observations	422	426	420	419	133	134
R-squared	0.20	0.15	0.23	0.16	0.22	0.30

Source: Analysis by authors.

Notes: Remote / not remote = below / above median travel time to Addis Ababa (1.54 hours). For a complete list of controls, see Appendix Table A1. Remoteness and access to the Addis market are not included as control variables. Cluster robust standard errors are in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.10.

When comparing daily intake of children below the age of five years in remote and non-remote households, we find that fewer children consume fresh milk and buttermilk in non-remote households (64 percent of children in non-remote households versus 75 percent in remote households and 9 percent versus 35 percent, respectively). The consumption of pasteurized milk, powdered milk, and cheese does not vary between remote and non-remote households. Overall, we observe that a single fasting day seems to positively impact the intake of milk in non-remote households (as was observed in Table 11), whereas the opposite is observed for consumption of pasteurized milk (Figure 4). These figures suggest that non-remote households prioritize milk sales during non-fasting periods, and thus allocate less milk to their children, whereas surplus milk gets increasingly allocated to children in these households during fasting periods.

**Figure 4. Impact of a fasting day on likelihood of daily consumption of different food groups for children in remote and non-remote households**



Source: Analysis by authors.

Notes:  $\mu^*$  denotes the non-fasting mean of the dependent variable. Coefficients of the fasting day indicator are shown along with cluster robust confidence intervals.

## 8. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The impact of food taboos on food consumption and value chains is not well understood. Fasting practices embedded within the largest religious community of Ethiopia, Orthodox Christians, create significant variation in demand for dairy products. However, evidence on adherence to fasting and its implications for the adaptation strategies of milk producers, for the pricing of dairy products, and on dairy consumption is limited. We study these issues in this paper for dairy producers. Choosing this particular target group allows us to measure the simultaneous impact of fasting on dairy intake within the producer households, as well as on production, processing, and marketing decisions of dairy producers. No such comprehensive study has been undertaken in the Ethiopian context before.

We find that fasting adherence is widespread and that the average Orthodox Christian adult fasts for 140 days a year. Milk producing households adopt diverse strategies to overcome periods of reduced milk demand associated with fasting. Overall, we observe that such households are affected by two impact pathways during fasting periods. First, these households lower their own intake of dairy during fasting, which creates a surplus of milk at the household level. Second, as

market opportunities are reduced during fasts, there are fewer outlets available for the surplus liquid milk. To manage this surplus milk, farmers adopt a combination of three strategies: (1) they reduce total milk output by aligning the number of cows in milk with fasting periods, (2) they increasingly channel produced milk to their youngest children, and (3) they expand processing of milk into less perishable dairy products, such as cheese or butter. The importance of each of these strategies, however, varies significantly along with the degree of access a milk producing household has to the major market of Addis Ababa. Remote households reduce their milk production significantly during longer fasting periods, process some of it into cheese or other dairy products, or feed some of their excess milk production to their children. Non-remote households, on the other hand, have been able to establish better arrangements with milk buyers so that they do not need to stop producing milk during fasting periods. Yet, during fasts, these milk producing households channel significantly more milk to their children and also process more into less perishable products. Furthermore, we find differential effects on prices for different dairy products, with small seasonal swings for liquid milk prices and larger ones for processed milk products.

Our results have several important policy implications.

- As the impact of fasting on milk consumption at national level is found to be relatively small and we find that children consume milk when it is available even during fasting periods, this suggests other issues such as availability and affordability – instead of fasting – are the main impediments to increased dairy consumption in Ethiopia. Further investments to stimulate the dairy sector are therefore needed to increase availability of dairy products at lower prices. In contrast to the rapid growth in crop output and productivity recorded in Ethiopia, ASF output has grown slowly and productivity has stagnated, seemingly due to low availability and adoption of improved inputs in the sector. The result has been high and increasing prices for dairy products (Bachewe and Minten 2019).
- We see a (small) number of children participating in fasts, even though they are, in principle, exempt from fasting. Further efforts at widely communicating the potential adverse developmental effects of fasting on children is needed.
- To help smoothen the effects of demand swings for milk and other dairy products and possibly to increase returns to investments in the sector, further efforts are needed towards enhancing processing practices (such as increasing production of UHT and powdered milk), ensuring availability of milk chilling centers, and improving transportation facilities in milk sheds and regionally to assure market integration and to expand dairy marketing to areas where fasting is less prevalent.

Furthermore, our findings point to a number of areas for further research. First, since our sample is not representative of the population at large, it would be useful to collect similar data with the same level of detail among all households, not only dairy producers. Second, future research would benefit from more focus on health outcomes and from repeated observations over time. Third, studies, in Ethiopia as well as in other countries, could target different religious groups to assess how their food habits and beliefs are related to food consumption and the development of food value chains. Finally, only dairy has been looked at in this study. It would be good to broaden the study to other ASF.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Control variables

Appendix Table A1: Descriptive statistics of the control variables

Variable	Unit	Household	Youngest child
<b>Household controls</b>			
Total income	'000 ETB/month	3.68 (4.52)	
Household size	#	6.02 (2.09)	
Orthodox Christian	0/1	0.85	
Ethnicity: Oromo	0/1	0.86	
Total milk production	l/month	400 (597)	
Total cows	#	2.82 (2.17)	
Cross-bred cows	#	1.14 (2.10)	
Cooperative member	0/1	0.04	
Access to Addis market	0/1	0.35	
Remoteness	hours	1.98 (1.46)	
Orthodox concentration	%	84.4 (20.64)	
<b>Youngest child controls</b>			
Age	years		2.01 (1.32)
Sex: male	0/1		0.56
Breastfed yesterday	0/1		0.56
Vitamins yesterday	0/1		0.04
Oral rehydration solution (ORS) yesterday	0/1		0.03
Observations		870	317

Source: Analysis by authors.

Note: When applicable, means are shown with standard deviations in parentheses.

### Appendix B: Seasonal milk production

Food production and consumption patterns vary with agricultural seasons in many countries. In Ethiopia, religion, in addition to weather cycles, also affects the dairy sector. Whereas the annual rainfall pattern affects dairy supply due to its impact on feed availability, the periodic occurrence of Orthodox fasting and feasts causes variation in demand for milk and other dairy products. We match both types of seasonality in Appendix Figure B1 and show how both sources of variation in production and demand over a period of 12 months preceding the survey impact dairy cow productivity (Appendix Figure B2); the number of cows in milk, both local and cross-bred (Appendix Figure B3); and average market prices for different types of dairy products, as reported by survey participants (see Figure 2 in the main text).

Appendix Figure B1 outlines the rainfall pattern and associated agricultural seasons as well as the timing of the main Orthodox fasts and feasts throughout the year. Seasonal rainfall distribution varies across different areas in Ethiopia, with some areas having spring rains. But generally most of the precipitation falls between June and September. The dry period usually takes places from February through May. Livestock feed availability follows this rainfall pattern, with feed being abundantly available from September to December, after which availability decreases. Critical feed shortages may occur between April and June (Gizaw et al. 2017).

This pattern of feed availability matches the seasonal pattern in dairy cow productivity in our sample (Appendix Figure B2). Daily milk production per cow is at its lowest average level between January and June (2.6 liters/cow), after which it slowly increases to about 3.3 liters per cow for the period between September and December. Milk producing households seem to align their production practices with the agricultural seasons. As feed availability increases between June and December, farmers hold a rising percentage of cows in milk (Appendix Figure B3).



Alternatively, one could argue that producers align their milk production to periods of reduced demand caused by fasting periods. They can do this by making sure that the dry periods of their cows coincide with long Orthodox fasting events. Some Orthodox fasting events overlap with periods of potential feed shortage problems (Appendix Figure B1). This is most obvious for the Apostles fast, which overlaps with the lean season during which the probability of acute livestock feed shortages is high. But also during the Lent fasting period, feed availability continuously decreases, causing economically rational producers to reduce milk production during this period.<sup>12</sup> However, given that the Orthodox fasting periods are scattered throughout the year, such a strategy may at best only partially tackle the mismatch between supply and demand.

**Appendix Figure B1: Rainfall and agricultural seasons and the timing of main Orthodox fasts and feasts through the year**

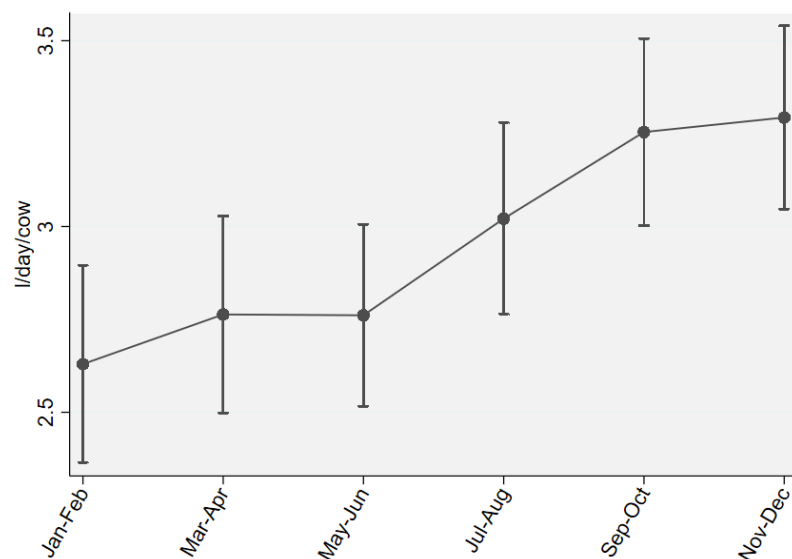
	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	
Rainfall pattern		Dry period				Summer rains							
Agricultural seasons						Lean season				Main harvest season			
Orthodox fasts and feasts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13

Source: Analysis by authors.

Notes: (1) Christmas, (2) Epiphany, (3) Nineveh fast, (4) Lent fast, (5) Easter, (6) Ascension, (7) Pentecost, (8) Apostles fast, (9) Feast of the Apostles, (10) Felseta fast, (11) Assumption feast, (12) Ethiopian New Year, (13) Advent fast.

The dates for Lent, Easter, and associated fasts and feasts are not fixed calendar dates, but can vary by several weeks from year-to-year based on the lunar calendar.

**Appendix Figure B2: Variation in average daily milk production per cow in milk through the year, liters**

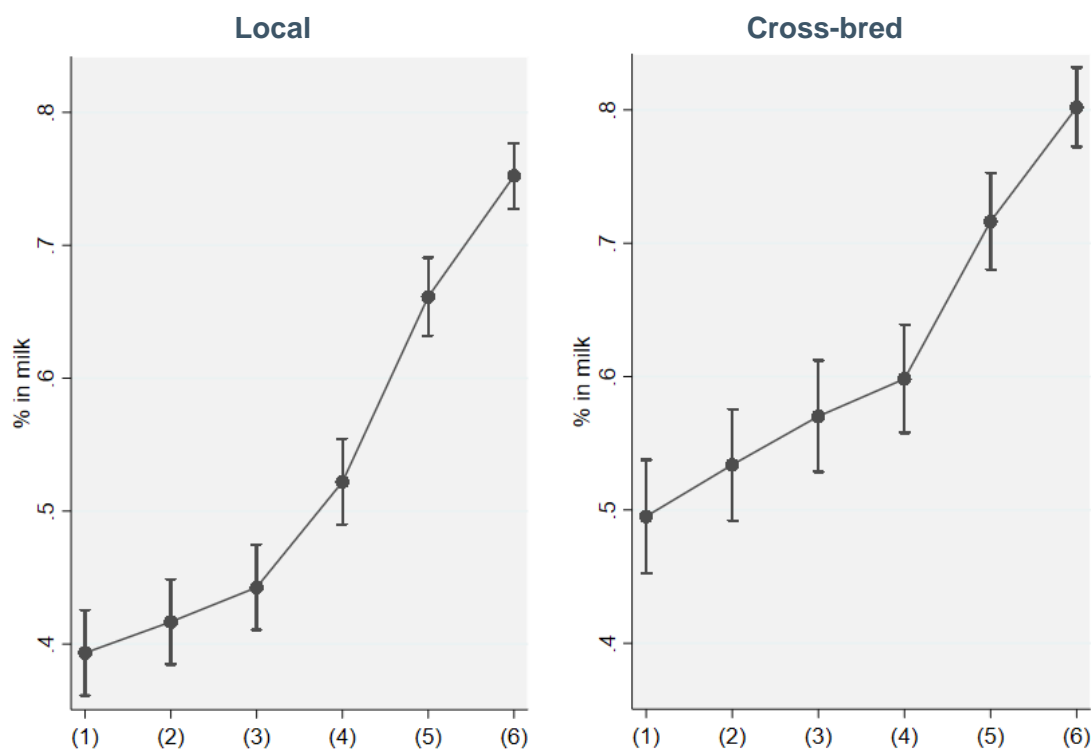


Source: Analysis by authors.

Note: Whisker-plots around points are 95-percent confidence intervals.

<sup>12</sup> Alternatively, one could argue that it is not producers who adjust to the fasting periods, but that Orthodox fasting practices may have emerged in famine-prone Ethiopia to help reduce the pressure on food supply, as suggested by Dirks (1980).

## Appendix Figure B3: Variation in local and cross-bred cows in milk through the year, share



(1) Jan-Feb; (2) Mar-Apr; (3) May-Jun; (4) Jul-Aug; (5) Sep-Oct; (6) Nov-Dec.

Source: Analysis by authors.

Note: Whisker-plots around points are 95-percent confidence intervals.

## Appendix C: Market participation and supply

As a robustness check, we ran two double-hurdle models to assess the impact of fasting on dairy market participation and dairy sales volumes. The results are presented in Appendix Table C1. As expected, fasting only seems to significantly impact the decision to sell milk.

**Appendix Table C1: Effect of presence of a long fasting season in the previous month on likelihood to sell dairy products (first hurdle) and total dairy product sales over the month prior to interview, conditional on dairy market participation (second hurdle)**

	Milk		Processed milk products	
	Likelihood to sell	Sales volume (l)	Likelihood to sell	Sales volume (kg)
Fasting past month (0/1)	-0.85*** (0.26)	1.63 (1.64)	39.13 (57.11)	4.31 (8.26)
Household controls	Yes		Yes	
Observations	855		855	
Log likelihood	-1750.57		-1982.24	

Source: Analysis by authors.

Notes: For a complete list of controls, see Appendix Table A1. Total dairy production is not included as a control variable. Cluster robust standard errors are in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.10.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)

**Eline D'Haene** is a Ph.D. student at the Department of Agricultural Economics, Ghent University, based in Belgium. **Senne Vandevelde** works at the EU in Brussels and is also with LICOS, KU Leuven, based in Belgium. **Bart Minten** is a Senior Research Fellow in the Development Strategy and Governance Division at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

### INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

1201 Eye St, NW  
Washington, DC 20005 USA  
T. +1-202-862-5600 | F. +1-202-862-5606  
Email: [ifpri@cgiar.org](mailto:ifpri@cgiar.org)  
[www.ifpri.org](http://www.ifpri.org) | [www.ifpri.info](http://www.ifpri.info)

### IFPRI-ESSP ADDIS ABABA

P.O. Box 5689, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
T. +251-11-617-2000 | F. +251-11-667-6923  
Email: [ifpri-essp@cgiar.org](mailto:ifpri-essp@cgiar.org)  
<http://essp.ifpri.info>

### POLICY STUDIES INSTITUTE

P.O. Box 2479, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
T. +251.11-550-6066; +251-11-553-8633  
F. +251-11-550-5588  
<http://psi.gov.et/>



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