

Welfare and use of livestock for draught in Swaziland

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Abstract

Farm animals are kept for various reasons in different societies. They are raised for food production such as meat and milk. They produce manure that is used in crop production. In some societies they have a social and cultural value. One of the oldest utilities is rearing for draught purposes. This work addresses the use of livestock for draught in Swaziland. The four species used for draught in Swaziland are cattle, donkeys, horses and mules. Cattle are mainly used for tillage, donkeys are used for transport, horses for riding and mules are used for logging. The majority of the farmers in the rural areas use cattle for tillage purposes, a few use donkeys and none use mules in tillage. Mules are mainly used in commercial forestry. Donkeys are mainly used for transporting goods and for the household. Most commercial farmers on title deed land do not use animals for draught. Welfare measures which are taken for draught animals include treatment and rest of injured or sick animals. Lactating animals and those in gestation are also not used. Oxen are not used for ploughing after dipping. Other factors considered are: environmental temperature, body condition of the animal and moisture content of the soil. It is concluded that animal draught is still important in Swaziland.

Introduction

The kingdom of Swaziland is a small land locked country sandwiched between Mozambique and South Africa. It is about 17 400 km² and can be divided into four major ecological zones namely: the highveld, the middleveld, the lowveld and the Lubombo plateau (Figure 1). The highveld is found in the West of the country, is mountainous and has near temperate climatic conditions. The lowveld is almost flat, found in the Eastern part of the country and has a semi arid climate. The majority of the Swazi people live in the rural areas, and practice mixed farming. They raise various farm animals such as cattle, goats, sheep, poultry, equids and pigs. Animals are raised for: consumption of end products such as meat, milk, and eggs; social and cultural value; productions of organic fertilisers and for draught power. Table 1 shows the numbers of different farm animals raised in Swaziland. As can be seen from these statistics, poultry are the most

populous followed by cattle and the least numerous are equids and sheep.

Use of animals for draught

There are four main species important for draught in this country and they include cattle, donkeys, horses and mules. The majority of farmers use cattle for draught power. Table 2 shows that greater than 88% of draught animals found on the Swazi Nation Land (SNL) are cattle. Cattle are important for many reasons such as food, manure social and cultural value and draught. Despite the fact that there is a government project to lease tractors to small-scale farmers, many SNL farmers still use animal power. Those who own cattle use mainly oxen. The statistics show that over 20% of the cattle population in the SNL are oxen. Oxen are mainly used for primary tillage, secondary tillage, weeding and transport. In the case of transport, oxen drag a sledge for carrying firewood, timber, kraal manure and dry maize cobs.

Table 1: Numbers of farm animals in the four ecological zones of Swaziland (MOAC, 1995)

Species	Highveld	Middleveld	Lowveld	Lubombo
Cattle	167 640	256 318	197 318	21 014
Goats	91 103	151 689	176 613	15 675
Sheep	8 333	8 974	5 835	1 140
Poultry	210 563	540 063	190 106	34 438
Equines	3 407	4 710	4 618	592
Pigs	9678	13 792	5 402	1 078

Table 2: Numbers of draught animals in Swaziland by land tenure (MOAC, 1995)

Species	Swazi Nation Land	Title Deed Land
Oxen/steers	91 297	10 606
Donkeys	11 209	524
Horses	761	452
Mules	76	148

Donkeys are the second most important draught animals in the SNL. They form about 10% of the population of SNL draught animals. Donkeys do not produce any edible product in Swaziland. They are mainly raised for draught power and for the production of manure. The use of the donkey for draught power is secondary to that of oxen. Where a farmer keeps both cattle and donkeys, the oxen could be used for primary tillage and the donkeys could be used for secondary tillage and transport. In cases where the farmer does not have cattle, the donkeys are used for primary tillage as well.

Horses and mules are very few and they form less than 1% of the population of draught animals in the SNL. They form 0.8% and 0.02% respectively. The reason for this lack of popularity could be attributed to the cost and use of these species. Horses are mainly used for transport, pulling a cart or a wagon. Mules are big and require a higher level of management that could be expensive to the SNL farmer. Mules are used for ploughing, and traction in the SNL. They are strong animals and the farmers' say they could use one or two mules for a job that would require four to five donkeys. This is possible because mules are a hybrid of a donkey and a horse and have hybrid vigour over their parents. A large number of mules (> 70%) are raised by the title deed land (TDL) farmers for the timber industry. Here, mules are used for pulling logs in the forests from sections that are not accessible by tractors.

Animal welfare

Welfare requirements of livestock refer to a husbandry system that is appropriate to the health and behavioural needs of the animal. It includes the provision of readily accessible water, adequate nutrition and ventilation, a suitable environmental temperature and rapid treatment of injury and disease (MAFF, 1975). There are no specific codes of recommendation for the welfare of draught animals in Swaziland. The livestock act, however, unequivocally state that no unnecessary distress should be caused on livestock. An on-going research project has shown that most livestock owners follow some welfare ethics to minimise unnecessary pain to their animals.

Cattle

Out of the four draught power species of livestock found in Swaziland cattle receive the best attention from the government. There are many dip tanks found throughout the regions of this country. All SNL farmers are required to send their cattle and goats to the dip tank for tick control. Cattle are dipped once every week in summer, and once every second week in winter. The veterinary assistants keep records of all cattle in each dip tank area and note deaths and slaughter information. Specimens are taken from dead animals and taken to the central veterinary laboratory in Manzini to monitor incidences of infectious diseases. The equines are not given such a health care attention as that for cattle. This reason is probable responsible for encouraging many farmers to raise cattle instead of equids.

The majority of farmers in the SNL use oxen for draught power more than the other species. In order for the oxen to perform better, they are well looked after. Their body score condition must be very good hence they demand to be given adequate feed. When there is a shortage of feeds, such as during the dry winters, particularly in the lowveld, most farmer do not use their oxen for draught power. During the ploughing season, there is usually sufficient grazing for the oxen and where necessary the oxen are left in the pasture at night to get extra grazing. The number of oxen used for ploughing varies according to the soil conditions. In the highveld and middleveld where most soils are heavy, at least 6 oxen are used to plough whereas in the lowveld where the soils are mainly sandy loams, at least four oxen are used for ploughing. In all the regions only two animals are used for secondary tillage and weeding. The law prohibits the use of oxen for draught immediately after dipping. This prevents unnecessary injuries on the neck of the ox, which may lead to poisoning with the acaricide. Oxen are not used for draught when it is raining as this may also cause scars and unnecessary pain. Most SNL farmers do not practice disbudding or de-horning of their calves. To prevent the oxen from causing injury against each other or to the farmer the horn tips are cut so that they become blunt. It is believed that sawing the horn tip is less painful than sawing the whole horn.

More than 80% of the farmers interviewed so far do not use cows for animal draught power. A few have admitted to using cows that have reproductive problems while they were still in the herd. Lactating and pregnant cows are generally not used for draught because of two main reasons. Firstly, pregnant animals are expected to carry the foetus without any external disturbances, which may result in abortion. Secondly, lactating cows are expected to divert most of their energy to milk production for the calf as well for the family.

Equids

Donkey rearing is secondary to cattle in the rural areas. Most donkey owners are those farmers who cannot afford to rear cattle. Most of these spent little or no money at all in acquiring their donkeys. The donkey farmers felt donkeys are easier to handle compared to oxen. They do not have horns and are less aggressive. Some are even hired by their neighbours to fetch water, firewood and sand. Donkeys are also used for transport, as it is said that they are 'the poor man's horse.' Donkeys of both sexes are equally used for draught. It is only toward the end of the gestation period that female donkeys are not used for draught. When ploughing most farmers use six to eight donkeys whereas two to four are used for secondary tillage and weeding.

There is no formal health care system for the donkeys in the SNL that is comparable to the dipping system of cattle. Donkeys are not taken to the dip tank for the control of tick borne diseases. There is not even a formal control programme for any donkey diseases. Most farmers believe that donkeys are capable of looking after themselves. A local veterinarian said he has attended to a donkey only when asked to castrate it. This was so despite the fact that he was asked very often to attend to many sick animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, chickens and even dogs and

References

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cats. Although other species such as cattle and goats are provided with supplementary feeding such as mineral lick, molassed stover, nothing is given to donkeys.

They are fewer horses than donkeys in the SNL. Horses receives better attention than donkeys as far as health and nutrition care are concerned. Sick horses are treated and there is a formal vaccination programme for horses. Probable this is because horses are mainly used for transport, hence they must be healthy to stay on the road.

Mules are better looked after than the rest of the draught animals in Swaziland. This is probable because they are mainly kept on private farms, where there is more capital available to manage the animals than on the SNL farms. The mules get adequate nutrition in the form of forage and concentrate feeding. In winter they are fed with hay which is a rarity in the SNL. Sick mules are well attended by the companies. When used for the logging there is no sexual discrimination in mules, they are equally used. Mules are also kept under shelter during the raining season and the stable are cleaner compared to the kraals used for cattle and donkeys in the SNL.

Conclusion

Although there are no specific codes of practice for the welfare of draught animals in Swaziland, farmers are trying to prevent any unnecessary pain on their draught animals. There is a need for government to ensure that welfare standards of draught animals are in place and are followed. This could probable reduce the unnecessary deaths of cattle and donkeys on the streets. Farmers and animal scientists should be concerned about the welfare of their animals before someone who is more radical and less sensitive to animal use for work starts dictating terms.

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