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Pre Birdflu Production System of Vietnamese H'mong Chicken

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Abstract

H'mong chicken can be found in the mountainous areas of Northern Viet Nam. The meat is traditionally known as the most tasty one among local and commercially produced chicken. This paper presents phenotypic characteristics and the production system based on data just before the birdflu epidemic broke out.

Agricultural production is based on shifting cultivation, the use of the hand hoe and husbandry of local breeds of buffalo, pigs and chicken. In the study area Maison District, Son La Province, Northern Viet Nam the human population was about 115 000 people and the chicken population estimate was 360 000 birds. Fifty-five households (8 % of total households) in three villages were surveyed using structured questionnaires between November 2003 to March 2004. In total 794 chicken were phenotypically described.

Flock sizes averaged 14.4 chicken per household. The sex ratio was one cock to only 1.5 hens. The flock structure indicated high chick mortality. 70 % of the chickens had brown feather colour including multicolour. Yellow skin colour dominated with a frequency of 94.7 %; 95.6 % and 96.9 % of chickens had black legs and beaks, respectively. Body weight of adult chicken was 1617 g (SE 52) on average. Hatchability was above 80 %, mean egg number per clutch 12 to 13 and egg weight 41 g. The majority of the households (85 %) provided chicken housing. All farmers supplemented whole maize twice per day, which could not be quantified. Chicken production was mainly for home consumption and rarely products were marketed despite the fact that pre-epidemic market prices for H'mong chicken were about one third higher than prices for commercial broilers in the urban market of Hanoi.

In conclusion, H'mong chicken are characterised by high variability in feather colour and performance but appear to be one population. The traditional system avoids inbreeding and input-output levels are apparently well balanced making the system sustainable. The pre-birdflu marketing potential was not realised by the local chicken keepers.

Keywords: Birdflu, H'mong chicken, Northern Viet Nam, phenotypic characterisation, subsistence production system