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## Strengthening Livestock Market Flows and Feeding Practices for Improved Livelihoods in Southern Zimbabwe

SABINE HOMANN, ANDRE VANROOYEN

*International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Zimbabwe*

### Abstract

The growing demand for livestock products offers income opportunities for small-scale farmers in semi-arid areas of Zimbabwe provided they could increase off-take rates and improve animal quality. To achieve this, farmers need to increase their investments in feeding methods and practices — but with poorly developed markets for livestock products and services, farmers have little incentive to make the necessary investments.

We conducted household surveys on cattle and goat production in three districts in Zimbabwe, at sites with differences in market access (proxied by distance to nearest market) and human population densities. The survey examined off-take rates, management practices and socio-economic profiles of livestock keepers. In addition, focus group discussions with livestock traders provided information on market opportunities and input technologies required.

Cattle provide only limited income, although they are the preferred form of investment. Goats are sold more often, to meet household expenses. Farmers use formal market systems in remote areas, while they choose informal marketing strategies in areas closer to urban markets — bypassing levies and transaction costs. Significant numbers of cattle offered for sale at official sales-pens are not sold — largely as a result of low prices offered by buyers due to poor animal quality or because of imperfect market situations where few buyers dictate very low prices. For goats no formal markets exist, but large numbers are sold to traders and then transported to urban areas, where demand is high. Prices are also low and variable during the year, because of a lack of market competition and poor animal condition.

The main challenges are to improve livestock markets and disseminate market information to small-scale producers. Premium prices paid for animals in better conditions will create the incentives for farmers to invest in improved animal feed and management technologies. This will require joint investments by both private and public sectors.

**Keywords:** Animal feed and management technology, crop-livestock farming systems, livestock market development