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Smallholder Sheep and Goat Production Systems in Southern Ethiopia: Opportunities and Limitations

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Abstract

Small ruminants are an integral part of mixed-farming systems throughout Ethiopia. Assessment of the existing small ruminant production systems is an important tool to inform researchers about the actual problems farmers face and the opportunities that exist within the systems. A survey was conducted from April to July 2004 in the Adilo and Kofele areas of the mixed farming systems of southern Ethiopia. Adilo is one of the most densely populated areas in Ethiopia. Kofele represents southern highlands populated at medium level and the farmers keep more livestock and own bigger farmland than their counterparts in Adilo. Following the identification of the major small ruminant supplier localities to the markets in the study area, ten of them were purposefully selected from each study site for further sampling. Then, an average of twenty households was randomly selected from each locality, totalling 399 households. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on productive and socioeconomic aspects which were later validated by group discussions. Small ruminants hold several roles in the study sites. They provide meat, milk and skins; however, the principal purpose of keeping sheep and goats is to generate income. Sheep milk consumption is widespread around Kofele unlike most agricultural systems in the country. Nearly all respondents in Adilo (93 %) reported that they fatten their animals for sale. Lack of feed which is directly related to the shrinking farm size was ranked as a major constraint by Adilo respondents while small ruminant diseases ranked as a topmost priority problem in Kofele. The growing demand for small ruminants both in local and international markets, the improving transportation infrastructure, and the experience of farmers in small ruminant keeping are practical opportunities to enhance the contribution of the sector. This study has produced a general understanding of the small ruminant systems and identified major challenges. A thorough monitoring of the productive and economic performance of small ruminants is required to capture full picture of their contribution thereby directing possible intervention areas to maximise benefits to the farmers.

Keywords: Ethiopia, mixed-farming systems, small ruminants