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Assessing and Comparing Income Generation of Livestock Holders in Olancho, Honduras. An Analysis Across Typical Landscapes and Farming Systems

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Abstract

The prolonged dry season (3–6 months) limits livestock production in wide parts of Central America. Responding to drought, livestock holders rely on feeding supplements, (concentrates, molasses) and conserved forage. Many small-scale farmers cease milk production during dry periods resulting in scarcity of cash.

Characteristics of farms across herd sizes (small 1–15, medium 16–70 and large > 71 heads) are compared in terms of land allocation, the use of supplements and conserved forage for livestock in dry and wet season.

Sampling of 86 farms was done in two groups. A random sample along a transect and a targeted sample of positive deviances, farms with known higher level of technification. Most of the income is generated with meat and milk.

Income per head of young stock (sold after 12 months) depended on the amount of milk given to the calves and the length of the lactation throughout the groups. Young bulls (sold after 24 months) bring more among the large producers. Positive deviances earn less with young stock than the others but earn more when producing young bulls.

Along with herd size, the availability of improved pastures rises whereas basic grain production declines. This suggests a more intensive livestock production for larger cattle owners and a more subsistence-oriented system for small producers. But comparing production cost per milking cow for the dry season and the income gained, points out that small farmers (provided that they milk in the dry season) are generating income in a more efficient way. This is partly due to high cost of forage production among large farmers. Small farmers obtain higher prices selling small quantities of milk to the local market. The highest dry season-income per cow was found among the positive deviances.

Improvement of dry season forage availability through stepwise seeding of improved forages and their conservation would thus be an appropriate and effective alternative to increase and sustain cash flow of poor producers. It would enable more of them to milk their cows during fodder scarcity periods.

Keywords: Cash, dry season, Forage, Honduras, Livestock, Socio-economics