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Production Objectives, Trait Perception and Breeding Goals of Sahiwal Cattle Keepers in Kenya

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Abstract

Sahiwal cattle and their crosses with other Zebu and taurine breeds play an important socio-economic role in various communities in developing countries in the tropics. In Kenya the Sahiwal has been used for upgrading the East African Zebu (EAZ) for improved performance in the southern rangelands, mainly by the Maasai pastoralists. However there has been no deliberate effort to understand why these pastoralists keep Sahiwal and their crosses as well as traits they consider important. Understanding the existing production circumstances is an important prerequisite in diagnosing the status and trends of the systems, and also as a basis to identify areas for future interventions. A survey was conducted between May and October 2009 in Kajiado, Transmara and Narok North districts to identify reasons for keeping Sahiwal cattle and their crosses and assess the relative importance of various traits. Sahiwal and their crosses fulfilled several roles that mainly included milk and meat production, and source of cash income. In addition they were also kept for breeding (mainly upgrading) and also for multiple objectives that included insurance against risks and social functions. These roles were however influenced to varying extents by various household characteristics such as literacy levels, age, region and number of livestock. Sahiwal and their crosses were generally perceived to be better in respect to production (size, growth performance and milk yield) and fertility (age at first calving, calving interval and ease) traits when compared to the EAZ. However the EAZ were rated high with respect to adaptability traits (disease and drought tolerance). Traits that farmers perceived as being of primary importance were milk yield, growth, body size, fertility and adaptability. Results from this study provide prerequisite knowledge that is vital in optimising the Sahiwal cattle breeding programme to be responsive to the needs of the Sahiwal keepers.

Keywords: Breeding goal, kenya, production objectives, Sahiwal cattle, trait perception