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## Camels in Botswana: Potential for Food Production and Ensuring Food Security

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### Abstract

Dromedary camels are multipurpose animals and play an important role in supporting the livelihoods of millions of people in semi-arid and arid zones of Africa. By virtue of their unique anatomical and physiological adaptation to desert environments, they not only survive severe droughts but also continue to produce milk during these periods while other domestic animals hardly thrive. They provide milk and meat for human consumption and are used for transportation of goods. Botswana is an arid country ideally suited for camel production. However, despite this potential, camels are not used for food production in Botswana. This study was, therefore, conducted to assess milk production potential of camels and to assess the current status of camels kept in Tsabong Ecotourism Camel Park. Data were generated through open-ended semi-structured questionnaire and field observations. All park workers and the manager were interviewed to generate the required information. The average daily milk yield of camels was found to be four litres. The camels produce this amount of milk only under natural browsing conditions, which suggests opportunity for improving milk production through appropriate supplementary feeding. The camel park is currently facing a wide range of problems such as feed shortage during the dry season, inbreeding and prevalence of diseases among others. The Tsabong camel herd is underutilised and performing well below its potential. The camels are currently used only for tourism purposes. However, the main reason for keeping camels elsewhere is food production, mainly milk production. Thus, due emphasis should be given to milk production from camels alongside camel tourism. Camels have a great potential to contribute significantly to food security, national economic growth and poverty alleviation in Botswana if appropriate interventions are taken to improve their productivity.

**Keywords:** Challenges, dromedary camels, milk production potential, utilisation