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Colombian Cattle Producers' Preferences for Improved Forage Technologies: Chances for Forage Breeding and Selection

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Abstract

The offer of improved forages in Colombia is characterized by its broad diversity. However, the adoption of improved materials is still very low despite numerous ecological and economic benefits for the cattle producers. This has led to various studies aiming at identifying the natural, social and cultural reasons inhibiting the adoption process. Some of these are that: a) innovations might have negative social connotations or create new problems for end-users; b) innovations might perform differently in different regions; c) traditional practices might be equal or better; d) extension programs might not be aligned with innovations or target the wrong population; and e) innovations might be too costly. From this perspective, participatory research methods can contribute to adoption by identifying experiences, demand, preferences and socio-economic characteristics of potential adopters and their farms and feeding this information back into the development of new innovations. This study has the aim to identify the preferences and demand of Colombian cattle producers for improved forage materials. During 2017, a total of 500 semi-structured interviews were conducted with cattle producers from the Caribbean (n=390) and Orinoquia (n=110) regions in Colombia. It was possible to identify an increasing concern among the producers about the impacts of climate change leading to a demand for more drought-tolerant forage materials with high nutritional quality. For producers from the Caribbean region, materials that help to increase milk production in double-purpose cattle systems are more important than for producers from the Orinoquia region. In turn, resistance to biotic stresses (Spittlebug) plays a crucial role for the Orinoquia region. In general, producers seem to be satisfied with most of the existing materials. This might be an obstacle for the adoption of new materials, i.e. if they do not differ too much from the existing ones. The findings are an important input for national and international forage selection and breeding programs and will provide a basis for decision making on where to set future priorities and how to allocate research and development funds. This, in the long run, will contribute to the development of materials that take into account the preferences and demand coming from the end-users and thus contribute to a faster adoption.

Keywords: Cattle production, forage breeding, improved forages, participatory research

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