

COVID-19 and the Colombian cattle sector: Current and potential developments, impacts and mitigation options

Stefan Burkart¹, Manuel Díaz¹, Karen Enciso-Valencia¹, José Luis Urrea-Benítez¹, Andrés Charry², Natalia Triana-Ángel¹.

¹Alliance Bioversity-CIAT, Tropical Forages Program.

²Alliance Bioversity-CIAT, Sustainable Food Systems

CONTACT: s.burkart@cgiar.org

Introduction

- » On March 11 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic, affecting humankind in an unprecedented way.
- » To protect public health, governments have taken a wide range of measures, such as broad testing schemes, the closure of schools, restaurants and bars, quarantine of individuals, and nationwide lockdowns.
- » This has largely affected the global economy, causing significant downturns in many sectors.
- » Compared to other sectors, these downturns seem to be rather delayed in the agriculture and livestock sector, but this perception might delude since many of the effects are still unquantified, resulting from data scarcity, or have not yet fully come through.
- » Since the agriculture and livestock sector is key to food security, nutrition and livelihoods, it is crucial for governments to identify and understand existing and potential negative impacts and implement actions to mitigate them on time.



Methodology

Qualitative approach: Data was compiled in 2020 through a review of relevant literature, public and private databases, media, response policies, and similar formal and informal assessments, as well as by consulting with experts from the cattle sector.

Results

Consumer perceptions and preferences will become more salient:

- The demand for food safety and traceability will change the way value chains operate and formality will increase.
- Sustainability and sustainable products will become more important.
- Providing consumers with information on traceability, sustainability, animal welfare, food origin and risks, will be more crucial than ever.

Consumer purchasing power has declined:

- Substitution of beef with cheaper protein sources will remain for some time, but this will open additional possibilities for exports.
- Product differentiation efforts will depend on consumer purchasing power, which will be reduced for an extended period after the crisis, making this endeavor a medium- to long-term strategy.

The formalization of value chains can lead to benefits for cattle and dairy producers:

- Transformation from extensive production systems towards more profitable, competitive, and sustainable production systems.
- Support needed for this transformation, e.g., the provision of information, capital, inputs, or market incentives.
- New business opportunities: e.g., the production of legume seeds for sustainable intensification, or hay and silage production.

Digitalization and virtualization have become important channels:

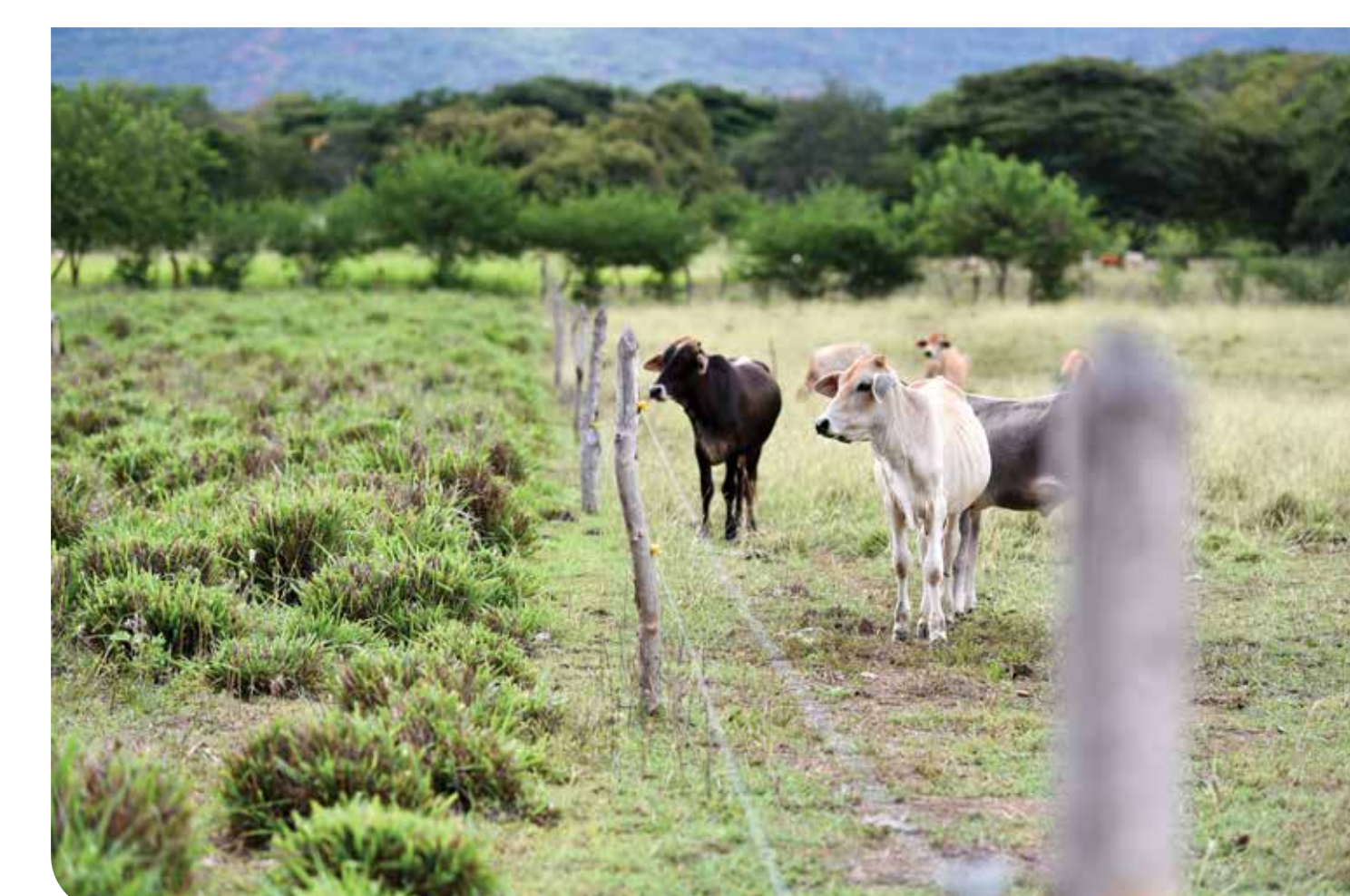
- Opportunity to rethink and reshape the future: cost savings, mitigation of climate change, new business models, higher impacts in education.

Conclusions

- » COVID-19 is affecting the Colombian cattle sector and its associated value chains in multiple dimensions and magnitudes. This includes all actors directly involved in or supporting the cattle value chains, consumers, as well as rural communities and vulnerable population.
- » The impacts are or will be negative in many cases and adequate mitigation measures need to be identified and implemented to assure food production, access, and security in the short- and long-term.

Objective

To provide policy and decision makers with an overview on the current and potential impacts of COVID-19 on the Colombian cattle sector and potential mitigation options in the short-, medium- and long-run, that help to reduce vulnerability and increase food system resilience and food security.



- Examples: Food purchase via Mobile Apps, capacity building virtual events, digital extension, digital tools for farm improvement.
- To take advantage of these opportunities, the digital infrastructure needs to be further improved, i.e., in rural areas.

Research and multi-actor initiatives will become more important:

- Resource scarcity requires bundling of resources and efforts in research, extension, policymaking, or multi-actor platform initiatives.
- This could lead to a harmonization of concepts, a more stable support for the sector and higher impacts in technology adoption.
- Research will need to shift its focus to prepare the sector and the food system to be able to better navigate through future crises.

The impacts of the pandemic are far from being gender-neutral:

- The pandemic will have lasting effects on rural livelihoods, altering family dynamics and endangering historical gains in terms of inclusion and gender equality.
- Lockdowns: increase domestic labor exploitation, gendered violence, and convoluted intra-family dynamics.
- New protocols and the persecution of informal markets will affect women and minorities more incisively, hindering their contributions to household economies and deepening gender inequalities.
- Closure of public schools: Poses several, serious risks to literacy amongst peasant communities, where equipment and access to the internet are scarce.

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Further reading

Burkart S.; Díaz M.F.; Enciso-Valencia K.; Urrea-Benítez J.L.; Charry-Camacho A.; Triana-Ángel N. 2020 COVID-19 and the bovine livestock sector in Colombia: Current and potential developments, impacts and mitigation options. International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT). Cali, Colombia. 36 p. <https://hdl.handle.net/10568/108354>

Burkart, S.; Díaz, M.F.; Enciso-Valencia, K.; Urrea-Benítez, J.L.; Charry-Camacho, A.; Triana-Ángel, N. (2020) COVID-19 y el sector ganadero bovino en Colombia: Desarrollos actuales y potenciales, impactos y opciones de mitigación. Cali (Colombia), Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT). 36 p. <https://hdl.handle.net/10568/108370>

