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70 years of small ruminant research in Fiji: Review and current challenges

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Abstract

Sheep and goats have been produced in Fiji from as early as the 1840s and the country currently has the largest small ruminant production of all Pacific Island Countries. The first local research on small ruminants started in the 1950s. Over the decades the small ruminant production systems have been influenced by numerous challenges but remained an integral part of agricultural production systems in Fiji.

A database search was performed to better understand technologies tested and developed in local small ruminant research activities. Historic literature reviews and additional grey literature were considered additionally. The available published literature was systematically reviewed identifying technologies that have been adopted and persisted over time. Factors fostering or constraining their adoption were assessed. In addition, several key informant interviews revealed current challenges and developments of small ruminant research, and extension, in Fiji.

Four main drivers of the institutional environment for small ruminant research in Fiji have been identified. Among them, the Ministry of Agriculture of Fiji has traditionally been a proponent of small ruminant research to this day. Its efficiency in delivering research outcomes has fluctuated greatly over time.

Results revealed that key production system aspects have also been the focal areas of small ruminant research in Fiji with a strong focus on gastro-intestinal parasite management, breeding and forage development. The development of the Fiji Fantastic sheep breed has been a concerted success of the research and extension system and remains of great importance.

Conclusions from the literature review and key informant interviews include that many of the current challenges have remained unchanged since the beginning of small ruminant production in Fiji. The government is trying to find new ways to support the development of the local small ruminant sector. An aging farming population, the status of small ruminant production compared to other agricultural activities, low accessibility of small ruminant technologies and traditional land lease systems remain substantial impediments.

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