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Mechanisms behind persistent smallholder dominance in the livestock sectors of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan

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Abstract

Livestock production in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan remains overwhelmingly smallholder-based three decades after independence, with household herds accounting for more than 90 % of cattle in both countries. This paper examines tenure security as a key variable shaping livestock investment and feeding strategies in two countries that share a Soviet institutional baseline, similar agro-ecological constraints, and politically protected cotton and wheat sectors, but pursued different forms of incomplete land reform after 1991. Both face persistent feed bottlenecks, limited formalisation, and constrained herd intensification despite continued policy attention to livestock sector upgrading.

Drawing on household survey data and semi-structured interviews conducted in Sughd, Tashkent, Jizzakh, Sirdaryo and Samarkand provinces between 2022 and 2025, I distinguish formal land tenure from the security producers experience in practice. In Tajikistan, formally heritable use rights coexist with presidential directives that override land-use decisions while in Uzbekistan, long-term lease arrangements remain revocable through administrative discretion and crop placement requirements.

The empirical focus is whether this distinction between formal and effective tenure security predicts livestock-specific outcomes: artificial insemination uptake, fodder cultivation on accessible land, herd dynamics by farm type, and the prevalence of informal arrangements such as sub-leasing and labour-for-feed exchange. Preliminary findings indicate that aggregate convergence in smallholder dominance masks substantive divergence in mechanism: crop mandates concentrate the binding constraint on land for feed in Uzbekistan, while dispersed enforcement gaps produce a comparable constraint profile in Tajikistan through different institutional channels. The paper closes with implications for livestock-relevant tenure reform under conditions where formal codification alone proves insufficient.

Keywords: Institutional constraints, land tenure security, livestock value chains, post-soviet agriculture

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