



SWOT Analysis of buffalo production in India

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It is a tribute to the staying power of the buffalo that despite all pervading apathy, it continues to be the biggest contributor to India's milk pool (55%) and remains a major meat producer and provider of draft power. Though the shifting loyalties of the farmers, albeit under public propaganda in favor of crossbred cattle has led to the erosion of its preeminence, it continues to register a higher growth rate (1.7%) than cattle (0.75%), probably a measure of its multiple utility.

Strengths

Buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*) is a good source of milk, meat and draught power and holds greatest potential for sustainable livestock production, especially in the Indian subcontinent. At present, 56.84 per cent (9.3-72 million) of the total world buffalo population dwells in India, contributing nearly 63 per cent (3.9 million MT) of the total world buffalo milk and 46.41 per cent (1.421 million MT) of the total world buffalo meat production.

Multiple roles and social dimensions of dairy animals are generally ignored, in view of "commodity and reductionist approach in research and development" (Dieckmann, 1994). This is true in case of buffaloes, which have multiple roles in rural systems, ranging from employment and income generation, food production, transport, nutritional security, to

being a part of cultural structure of the society. In many parts of rural India it is still a custom to reserve good buffaloes to be given as part of dowry in daughter's marriage. The women take pride in showing off these animals. In many parts of our country one can come across folk songs, based on buffaloes (as above), an indication of sociocultural linkage.

There is a steady growth in buffalo population (higher compared to cattle), observed since last decade, in most of major dairy states. This may be because of its multiple utility. A good buffalo is a valuable asset to any rural family and can be easily encashed to meet financial exigency. Buffaloes are easy to handle and maintain, with less health problems, can sustain on coarse feed/fodder. They are known to be good converters of fibrous crop residues into high quality food (milk and meat), provide organic manure. Buffalo contributes significantly to family nutrition by providing nutritionally rich food at low cost to the family. It is common practice to keep a good crossbred cow along with buffalo in buffalo dominated areas and the women indicate that the cow milk is for sale and the buffalo milk for home consumption!. At the same time, there is a good market demand for buffalo milk. In Karnataka, Dharwad distt milk producers cooperative union has come up with special buffalo milk brand called 'Shubham' which is in great demand. Buffalo meat (Carabeef) is equally popular due to its unique properties. Carabeef contains very low fat and cholesterol, almost half the level present in beef. No report appeared till date indicating BSE in buffaloes. Buffalo production satisfies most of important developmental issues like gender, equity and environment. More than 60 per cent of buffalo production is in the hands of landless, marginal and small farmers and thus any improvement in buffalo production would largely benefit low income groups. Shukla *et al* (1994 and 1995), compared returns from different farming systems for economic analysis and reported that a mix of good buffaloes and crop production provides highest returns and maximum employment to farmers. The study conducted by NABARD (1997) showed that the dairy production based on crossbred cows and buffaloes was viable but the rate of returns was higher from buffaloes. Environment friendliness can be considered as strength of buffaloes. Milking buffaloes are rarely grazed and are easily amenable to stall feeding so they are not likely to cause overgrazing.

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