
Vital Role of Sheep Farming

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Introduction :

Sheep with its multi-facet utility for wool, meat, milk, skins and manure, form an important component of rural economy particularly in the arid, semi-arid and mountainous areas of the country. It provides a dependable source of income to the shepherds through sale of wool and animals. It plays an important role in the livelihood of a large percentage of small and marginal farmers and landless labourers engaged in sheep rearing. Sheep and goats are important species of livestock for India. They contribute greatly to the agrarian economy, especially in areas where crop and dairy farming are not economical, and play an important role in the livelihood of a large proportion of small and marginal farmers and landless labourers.

The advantages of sheep farming are:

- Sheep do not need expensive buildings to house them and on the other hand require less labour than other kinds of livestock.
- The foundation stocks are relatively cheap and the flock can be multiplied rapidly.
- Sheep are an economical converter of grass into meat and wool.
- Sheep will eat varied kinds of plants compared to an other kind of livestock. This makes them excellent weed destroyer.
- Unlike goats, sheep hardly damage any tree

- The production of wool, meat and manure provides three different sources of income to the shepherd.
- The structure of their lips helps them to clean grains lost at harvest time and thus convert waste feed into profitable products.
- Mutton is one kind of meat towards which there is no prejudice by any community in India and further development of superior breeds for mutton production will have a great scope in the developing economy of India.

Scope for Sheep Farming

The country has 71.6 million sheep as per 2012-13 annual report of Animal Husbandry Department and ranks sixth in the world. The contribution of sheep through export of meat is 8 per cent of the total export value of agricultural and processed food products. Sheep skin in the form of leather and leather products is also exported. Sheep make a valuable contribution to the livelihood of the economically weaker sections of the society.

Role as a livestock

- Sheep are mostly reared for wool and meat. Sheep skins and manure constitute important sources of earning, the latter particularly in southern India. Milk from sheep is of limited importance and that too in very limited areas of Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan and Gujarat. Indian sheep are not regarded as dairy sheep.

- Basically Sheep are very much compatible for breeding because of their hardiness and adaptability to dry conditions; the north-western and southern peninsular regions of the country have a large concentration of sheep. In the tropics, they are non-seasonal breeders and can be made to lamb throughout the year.
- The productivity of Indian sheep is lower than those of agriculturally more advanced countries. Yet considering their nutritional and physical environment, their productivity cannot be considered as inefficient.
- The major reasons for low productivity are inadequate grazing resources, diseases causing high mortality, morbidity and consequent reduced production, and serious lack of organized effort for bringing genetic improvement.

Conclusion

Sheep were earlier reared for wool as the major produce while with paradigm shift in agriculture meat has replaced wool. More than 70% Indian consumers are non-vegetarian by choice with preference for sheep meat. With rapid urbanization and improvement in economic status, the demand for meat is likely to increase further than the present level of 6

kg/person/year. Moreover the demand and for meat in southern states, Jammu and Kashmir and export market is increasing rapidly requiring development of technology to meet the challenge. Sheep are reared mainly by poor people belonging to lower state of the society and serve either as the main or supplementary source of income for them. They are valued for both mutton and wool production. Indigenous sheep productivity is low compared to exotic sheep. It is most docile and earliest domesticated among farm animal for basic needs of food and clothings. Its converts food and roughage cheaply into good cash products and fertilize land. Sheep are small animals easy to manage. They are kept by poor farmers and landless labourers for meat, wool, skin, manure and to some extent even milk. Sheep with multifaceted utility plays an important role in arid and semi-arid areas with marginal and sub marginal land unfit for crop production, even under dry land farming

Reference

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