

AN ASSESSMENT OF DAIRY CATTLE FARMING IN THE MURUNKAN VETERINARY REGION IN MANNAR DISTRICT

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This study was designed to assess the dairy cattle farming in *Murunkan* veterinary region in Mannar district as there is a dearth of updated information on the dairy sector in this region. A survey was conducted involving 100 dairy cattle farmers randomly selected from *Murunkan* veterinary region in Mannar District of Sri Lanka. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data. Descriptive statistics were employed for data analysis. The majority of the farmers reared indigenous non-descriptive type cattle under extensive (78%), semi-intensive (16%) and intensive (6%) systems as the primary source of income. The average milk yield of a cow in the extensive, semi-intensive and intensive systems were 0.92, 0.90, and 1.2 L day⁻¹ respectively. Mean herd size and mean milking cows in the extensive, semi-intensive and intensive systems were 33, 48, and 12 animals and 14, 9, and 6 cows, respectively. Pastures available on roadsides, reservations, uncultivated paddy fields and marginal forest lands were the main sources of feed in the extensive system whereas Super Napier (*Pennisetum purpureum*) and CO3 (*Pennisetum purpureum* x *Pennisetum americanum*) with concentrates were fed by semi-intensive and intensive system farmers. Main sources of drinking water for cattle were irrigation canals, ponds, village tanks and dug wells. Decline of available grazing lands in the *Maha* season was the major challenge faced by farmers in this region. During this season cattle were restricted to marginal forest lands identified for grazing and milking was not practiced. Further, farmers have experienced in stealing their cows, calves and bulls due to weak supervision. Issue related to the shortage of grazing lands during *Maha* season is an essential factor to be considered to have a well-established dairy farming system in the *Murunkan* veterinary region in Mannar district.

Keywords: Cattle farming, Indigenous dairy cattle, Lack of grazing lands, Rearing system