ASSESSMENT OF WELFARE STATUS OF CATTLE REARED UNDER EXTENSIVE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM: A CASE STUDY IN ANURADHAPURA DISTRICT OF SRI LANKA

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This study assessed the welfare status of dairy cattle reared under extensive management systems in the Anuradhapura district. A cluster sampling method was employed to collect data from 138 farms using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and Chi-squared test were used to analyse the socio-demographic characteristics, management practices, and welfare status of dairy cattle. The results revealed that the majority of the cattle farmers were male (81%) and had 1 to 5 years (44%) of experience in farming. The average herd size and the daily milk production were 7.6±5.1 animals and 5.9±1.7 L per animal, respectively. Most of the cattle (56.2%) had a body condition score (BCS) of 2 while the average grazing h day^{-1} was 8.6±0.9. The majority of farmers (79%) did not provide water during the daytime while a significantly higher ($p<0.05$) percentage (96.4%) of cattle received unclean water. The proportion of animals with a clean udder, hind quarters, and lower hind leg in the assessed population was 88.4% while fewer farmers (11.8%) provided a pen for calves. Udder problems (10.8%), nasal discharge (5%), and hairless patches (3.6%) were more common than the measured disease conditions. Dehorning was practised by 2.9% of farmers and none of them practised any pain relief techniques. The daily milk production per animal was associated ($p<0.05$) with the number of grazing hours, BCS, amount of concentrates fed, and experience of the farmer. The study concludes that cattle reared under extensive management systems experienced prolonged hunger and thirst, discomfort, pain, and distress hence, it requires interventions to uplift the welfare of the animals.

Keywords: Body condition score, Discomfort, Grazing, Prolonged hunger