



FACTSHEET



The Small Ruminants Industry In the Caribbean



Small ruminants represent an important socio-economic asset that has a special role in the regional effort towards the diversification of the export-crop agriculture, poverty alleviation and rural development. Indeed there is a very high demand for the commodity in almost all the territories, with the local product usually fetching premium prices. However, currently imported mutton and goat meat account for a higher proportion of the domestic supply. For example, between 1993 and 1996, on average, imports accounted for 83% of the domestic supply in Antigua and Barbuda, 93% in Barbados, 63% in Jamaica and 73% in Trinidad and Tobago.

CHARACTERISTICS Production systems

The relatively low local production of mutton and goat meat is partly due to the structure of the industry that has prevailed during the past several decades. Small ruminants production in the Caribbean is undertaken principally by small farmers and part-time producers, and mainly on small parcels of land or on open lots and roadsides. The all-in-one system whereby the same farmer produces breeders, weaners and fatteners is the dominant production system and the animals are managed extensively, semi-intensively or intensively. Specialized production systems such as breeder stock, weaner stock and feedlot fattening production are relatively new and few. Hence

small ruminants production as the sole commercial enterprise or even as the major component in a mix of commercial enterprises is rare.

Marketing

The marketing channels appear to be clearly delineated. Most of the animals produced in the region are sold on hoof mainly at the farm gate. For the meat market the regional study conducted by Agrocon Ltd. found out that local mutton and goat meat are distributed mainly through supermarkets, meat shops and restaurants whereas the imported meat goes through the hotels to service the tourism industry.

Table 1. Small ruminants population ('000)
(FAO Statistical Database)

	1986	1991	1996	1998
B'DOS	48	44	46	46
BVI	16	16	16	10
CUBA	488	495	429	429
D/REP	568	675	705	705
HAITI	1,215	1,233	1,380	1,798
JAM	433	442	442	442
LEEW	49	49	50	47
T & T	68	73	71	71
TOTAL	2,885	3,027	3,139	3,548

EMERGING TRENDS

The local small ruminants industry has received much attention during the last ten years or so and as a result there have been significant improvements in the structure and the level of production. For example in Barbados, the British Virgin Islands, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, the Leeward Islands and Trinidad & Tobago local production increased, on average, by about 21%

between 1986 and 1998 (Table 1). In Jamaica, the small ruminants population doubled from 206,000 heads in 1990 to 450,000 heads in 1999. Part of this increased production can be attributed to natural progression and the perceived profitability of small ruminants production but undoubtedly improved production technologies have contributed immensely to this growth. In the English-speaking Caribbean several research and development

projects executed by CARDI, the Ministries of Agriculture and other organizations such as the Sugarcane Feed Centre in Trinidad & Tobago have produced or adapted technologies which have been adopted successfully by producers. There has been breed development, housing solutions from local resources, feed resources development and training in improved husbandry practices, including identification and record keeping.



Steering Committee of the Goat Breeders Society of Jamaica

The breed improvement programmes have produced a variety of quality pure bred and cross bred small ruminants germplasm from Anglo-Nubians, Alpines, Saanens, Toggenburgs and Boers for goat production and the Barbados Blackbelly, Persian Blackhead, West African and Virgin Island White for sheep production.

Also producers are now convinced of the positive role of by-product feeds as complements to the proprietary concentrate feeds. The Barbados Agricultural Society

has secured export markets for the Barbados Blackbelly germplasm and has started a dedicated feedlot production system. In Trinidad & Tobago niche markets for fresh chilled lambs have also been organized for the benefit of the producers. Above all producers have begun to recognize the business potential of small ruminants production.

Again Jamaica exemplifies the other tangible developments taking place in the small ruminants industry in the region. The Goat Breeders Society of Jamaica,

a registered society affiliated to the Jamaica Agricultural Society and the Jamaica Live-stock Association was formed in 1997. A Herd Book for the registration of pedigree stock has been opened. A score of specialized breeder farms has emerged. The industry is now fully supported by suppliers of goods and services, for example commercial feed manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies.

THE WAY FORWARD

The foregoing points to the potential that the small ruminants industry has to contribute to the economic well-being of the peoples of the Caribbean. In order for this potential to be realized fully constraints to production and marketing that still prevail in the various territories should be identified so that appropriate research and development programmes may be developed for their resolution. In particular there is the need for:

We need to:

- Increase numbers
- Diversify production
- Adopt feeding systems that optimize and conserve natural resources
- Develop new markets
- Adopt business approach

- Increased numbers of quality stock.
- Diversification of the production systems to include specialized enterprises - weaner stock, feedlot and breeder stock production.
- Diversification and the development of markets for other small ruminants products such as goat cheese.
- Application of feeding systems that employ resources that optimize biomass production from a

small unit of land.

- Establishment of the economics of the production systems and enterprises.
- Adoption of business approach to small ruminants production.

CASRUNet will have an important role to play in the attainment of these objectives



Typical Sunday goat market in Jamaica

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