Sheep Fattening Enterprise as a Strategy for Poverty Reduction:
A Case Study of Some Key Local Government Areas (LGAs) of
Niger State

Emmanuel L. Shiawoya

Department of Animal Production, Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger State,
Nigeria, P.M.B. 65, Nigeria
Telephone: 234-8036413670, E-mail: shiawoya2000@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT A study was conducted in four key LGAs of Chanchaga, Bosso, Paiko and Kafi in Niger State, in the Guinea Savanna zone to assess the role of sheep fattening, a common practice amongst rural farmers in Niger State, as a strategy for poverty reduction. A total of 80 scheduled interview questionnaires, 20 questionnaires per LGA, were designed and administered to elicit information on various parameters including aim of the enterprise, period of sales of fattened sheep, cost of investments and benefits derived there from. The respondents were randomly selected for interview on face-to-face basis. Results obtained revealed that fattening for sale only and for sale and family consumption were popular in all the LGAs. Differences in the frequency of sales amongst the LGAs were not significant (P>0.05). The cost of feed inputs were, however, significantly higher (P<0.05) in the more urbanized LGAs of Chanchaga and Bosso than Paiko and Kafi. Market prices of similar sizes of sheep in the four LGAs were significantly different (P<0.05), being higher (₦6,000.00 per 30-40 kg sheep) in Bosso LGA and least (₦1,500.00 per 15-19 kg sheep) in Paiko LGA. Significantly (P<0.05) higher profit margin (₦1,790.00) was obtained for Kafi LGA as compared with ₦1,220.00, ₦1,013.00 and ₦398.00 for Bosso, Chanchaga and Paiko LGAs respectively. These results indicate that sheep fattening as an enterprise by the small holder farmer, apart from providing job opportunity, can be employed to cushion the effect of poverty amongst the rural poor.

INTRODUCTION

The common perception of poverty and attempt to measure it are often centred on income. That is, how much a person or groups of persons earn to determine the affordability of the basic needs of life. The inability to earn sufficient money, for whatever reason, can impose a major constraint on the person’s life and mark him/her out as poor. It has been stated by Shiawoya (2002) that poverty, most often, is perceived as a lack of resources for reasonably comfortable living.

Niger State is favourably placed for the production of both food crops and livestock, and farmers in the state have been found to be actively involved in the rearing of both sheep and goats, which are marketed to supplement their family income from other sources (Adama and Ndako-Gona, 2003). Reduction of poverty could, therefore, be achieved if efforts are focused on income generating projects, such as cottage industries, including small ruminants (sheep and goat) production ventures. Encouraging small ruminants production on a large scale among the farmers will enhance the supply of adequate animal protein for the people (rural and urban) and even surplus for export to neighbouring countries, thereby increasing the earning capacity of the peasant producers, thus alleviating their poverty condition.

Specific Objective: The specific objective of this study was to assess the role of sheep fattening, a common practice amongst rural farmers, as a strategy for poverty reduction, especially amongst the rural poor.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Study Area: The study was conducted in the four key LGAs of Chanchaga, Bosso, Paiko and Kafi in Niger State, in the Guinea Savanna zone. The study area lies between longitudes 5°30’ and 6°30’ E and latitudes 9°00’ and 9°30’ N, with an estimated 23.1 % of the total sheep population of the state (RIM, 1989). The major livestock markets in the study area include Minna main market, Paiko, Tungan-Mallam, Kwakuti, Kafinkoro and Adunu.

Sampling and Questionnaire Administration: A total of 80 structured questionnaires, 20 questionnaires per LGA, were administered. The
respondents were randomly selected for interview on face-to-face basis. The questionnaires were designed to obtain information mainly on the purpose of engaging in sheep fattening, period of sales of the animals, type and cost of feed inputs, average market prices of the animals, and benefits actually derived from the enterprise.

Data Analysis: Data collected were subjected to analysis of variance (ANOVA) and SPSS computer package version 0.9 for windows 2000. Values of P < 0.05 were considered significant in the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of engaging in sheep fattening enterprise is examined in Table 1. Differences in responses on fattening for sale only and fattening for sale and family consumption in the four key LGAs were not significant (P > 0.05). Fattening for family consumption, however, showed significant difference (P < 0.05) in the number of respondents between Chanchaga and Kafi LGAs, with higher number of respondents from Chanchaga LGA. It is observed that Chanchaga LGA is essentially urban, with crop farming confined mainly to the city fringes. In their survey of farmer-pastoralist conflict in Niger State, Shiawoya and Yaro (2002) had reported that the land in these areas were used for crop cultivation and the supply of fodder, crop residues and water for livestock production, especially during the dry season. The high cost of animal protein in such urban areas could have motivated more farmers to go into small ruminant fattening, in order to improve family income.

Table 2 shows data on the time of sales of the fattened animals. Although animals were sold more often during festival periods (Sallah and Christmas) in all the LGAs, differences between these and other periods were not significant (P > 0.05). Shiawoya and de Leeuw (1971) found that sheep fattening for sale during Sallah festivals was a very popular enterprise by small scale farmers in the same Guinea Savanna zone. The findings in Table 2 augur well for the small scale farmers, since they could always fall back on these small ruminants anytime they are cash-strapped.

The costs of feed inputs are given in Table 3. Except for crop residues, results showed no significant differences (P > 0.05) in the costs of inputs used by the respondents in the LGAs. The cost of the crop residues was significantly higher (P < 0.05) in Chanchaga and Bosso than in Paiko and Kafi LGAs. It is observed that Chanchaga and Bosso are more urbanized than Paiko and Kafi LGAs. Hence access to crop residues, which are more in abundance in rural than urban settings, is much easier in Paiko and Kafi than in Chanchaga and Bosso LGAs. On this account, cost of feed inputs involving crop residues could be fairly reduced in fattening operations in LGAs that are of more rural setting. Such a situation will also be more favourable to the small scale farmer taking up sheep fattening under a rural environment. It was observed by Bolorunduro et al. (2001) that increasing meat yield of ruminants through fattening could easily be

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of questionnaires administered/LGA</th>
<th>Chanchaga</th>
<th>Bosso</th>
<th>Paiko</th>
<th>Kafi</th>
<th>SEM</th>
<th>Sig. level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fattening for sale only</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>Ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fattening for family consumption</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fattening for sale and consumption</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>Ns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SEM = Standard Error of the mean
ab = means in the same row having different superscripts differ significantly (P < 0.05), ns = not significant(P > 0.05), * = significant (P < 0.05), Source: Field survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of questionnaires administered/LGA</th>
<th>Chanchaga</th>
<th>Bosso</th>
<th>Paiko</th>
<th>Kafi</th>
<th>SEM</th>
<th>Sig. level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During festival (Sallah/Christmas)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When the owner wishes to sell</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When there is problem to solve in the house</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When animals reach market weight</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SEM = Standard Error of the mean
ns = not significant(P > 0.05), Source: Field survey
enhanced by the use of cereal crop residues whose feeding value has been improved through technologies that have already been developed at various on-station trials in Nigeria.

Table 4 highlights market prices of different sizes of fattened sheep in the four key LGAs. The market prices of large (30-40kg), medium (20-29kg) and small (15-19kg) - size sheep in the various LGAs were found to be significantly different (P < 0.05). Highest price (₦6,000.00) of large size sheep was obtained in Bosso LGA, with least price (₦4,800.00) in Chanchaga LGA. Price for medium size sheep was, however, highest (₦3,600.00) in Chanchaga and least (₦2,600.00) in Paiko LGAs. Small size (15-19kg) animals fetched highest price of ₦2,500.00 in both Chanchaga and Kafi LGAs, with least price (₦1,500.00) in Paiko LGA. Based on the three categories of animals, the prices seemed to show no definite pattern. It is considered, however, that the presence of the university community in Bosso could have influenced the price of the animals, due to the awareness that animal protein intake is necessary for good health. On the other hand, Chanchaga, being more densely populated, could attract more of such animals for sale, thus depressing prices.

Data on overall average profit margin obtained from the three categories of sheep from each LGA are presented in Table 5. The comparatively higher profit margin observed for Kafi LGA could have been due to the fact that cost of production input was least in this LGA. Profit margins appear moderate since family labour is usually ignored under small scale farming activity in Nigeria.

Results obtained from this study showed that fattening sheep for market by the small scale farmer is feasible and profitable. The profit margin obtained could certainly meet the farmer’s immediate domestic need, and thus cushion him/her against the effect of endemic poverty. Fattening sheep for sale is also an enterprise that could readily be handled by the farmer since,
according to Shiawoya et al. (2001), small ruminant production is already a prominent feature amongst rural families in Nigeria. Thus, even with as little financial input as was observed in this study, the enterprise can be made profitable.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study reveals that sheep fattening, as an enterprise by the small holder farmer, even with as little financial input as was observed in this study can be profitable. It could also provide employment opportunities in sub-urban settings where resource inputs are likely to be more abundant, thus minimizing rural to urban drift of able-bodied young men and women on the farms. Such will greatly reduce the crippling poverty situation afflicting Nigeria’s rural communities.

In the light of the above it is recommended that sheep fattening associations/cooperatives be established at LGA levels to enhance access to credit facilities from every available source. This will aid expansion of the enterprise, thus ameliorating the poverty profile, as well as improve animal protein intake of the generality of Nigerians.

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