Livestock marketing channels in central Botswana: Results of a snapshot survey

In December 2012, a snapshot survey was conducted in two villages (Taupye and Thabala) and one semi-urban area (Serowe) in Botswana’s Central District. The aim was to characterize, using rapid appraisal techniques, value chain actors’ knowledge, practices, structure and performance.

The survey included focus group discussions and individual interviews with farmers, butchers, supermarkets and consumers and discussion of the results with stakeholders in February 2013.

The main reported market channels for selling cattle in the district are the Botswana Livestock Commission (BMC) and butchers, with few sales to individuals. For sheep and goats, the main channels were sales to individuals, followed by butchers.

Channel choice
Factors affecting channel choice include:

- Difficulties in getting sales permits for cattle sales, due to non-availability of veterinary service staff or technical difficulties with the bolus or bolus readers;
Preferences for keeping cattle into advanced age when BMC requires delivery to collection points rather than purchasing at the farm gate;

A reported lack of understanding of BMC’s quality requirements.

Prices:

- Government purchase programs provide fixed, and sometimes the best prices for small stock – 500 Pula for a goat compared to 400-700 from a butcher;

- Traders and feedlot owners are reported to offer low prices, possibly because they may act as agents for BMC and so extract a margin;

- Butchers offer immediate cash payment at reasonable prices (around 3,000 Pula per head for cattle) generally irrespective of age, while BMC’s process for older cattle are about the same but paid after a 2-week delay.

Few producers and traders use scales, but slaughter values are based on weight. Producers are less informed on weight than are most buyers, and hence are reluctant to sell heavy cattle via traders. However, heavier cattle are usually older and not in demand from BMC which operates more transparent systems.

Next steps

The project is handing on this snapshot survey method, and advocating its use by government agencies tasked with supporting livestock development.

The issues raised in this survey are being used in the analysis of a nationally-representative survey conducted in three districts in June 2013. The large survey will benchmark costs and competitiveness and further analyze sales and purchase channels for cattle and small stock.

Results of these analyses are being used to design improved training materials and processes for use by extension.

Insights into the functioning of the regulatory and administrative systems for cattle and small stock marketing are being used in the design of improved policies.

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The project is implemented by the Botswana Institute for Development Policy Analysis, the Botswana Ministry of Agriculture and ILRI and contributes to the CGIAR research program on policies, institutions and markets.

The project seeks to:

- better define smallholder livestock production systems and to identify the factors affecting the productivity of smallholder livestock producers and assess their competitiveness

- understand and improve conditions for market participation and value addition in markets for livestock, livestock products and inputs

- strengthen the capacity of agricultural education and extension

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