Food safety and animal health in the Menz sheep meat value chain, Ethiopia

Background
Menz District is a highland region in Central Ethiopia. Most inhabitants are Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. Therefore sheep production and sales are influenced by national and religious holidays. The three main lambing periods are in December to January, April to June and November. The predominant production system is mixed crops and livestock.

Value chain challenges
Diseases and starvation (feed shortage) are the main meat production constraints (Figure 1). Religion plays a role as well. Sale of meat is therefore limited by fasting periods (some 70% of the year) when meat consumption is forbidden. This leads to demand peaks in April, September until October and December and January. Limitations in cash availability very much influences the amount of meat consumed (for Protestants as well as orthodox).

Livestock mortality
The main reason given for livestock deaths is disease. This is exacerbated by the poor nutritional status of the livestock. Climate variability also adds to restricted feed availability. Veterinary services are said to be mostly absent, faulty or insufficient.
Food safety

Menz people care for food safety. They have some knowledge they use to mitigate foodborne zoonoses. Some observations include:

- Meat is usually consumed quickly after slaughter or preserved. But there are reports of emergency slaughter of diseased animals followed by their consumption.
- Dark or foul-smelling meat is not consumed.
- Meat that is considered risky is usually boiled. Dulet (consisting of lamb tripe and liver) is usually consumed raw or very lightly cooked.

Future goals

During the value chain assessment process and subsequent discussions (early 2013), stakeholders from the district identified the following vision for their part of the small ruminant value chain development program in Ethiopia: By 2020, to have increased income and consumption of quality sheep meat of all VC actors through an effective and sustainable Menz sheep value chain.

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