

FNL.AGR.9

EVALUATION OF THE PRESENT STATUS OF *JAFFNA LOCAL SHEEP*

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A study was conducted to evaluate the current farming activities and the status of *Jaffna Local Sheep* (JLS), which is the only indigenous sheep existing in Sri Lanka. Seventy households were surveyed in 11 veterinary ranges covering all the areas where JLS are reared. Information on management aspects, breed characteristics and socio economic status were collected through a structured questionnaire, key informant surveys and personal observations. Reproductive parameters were calculated based on farmer information while the inbreeding coefficient level was calculated based on effective population size.

All the farmers were educated upto grade 5 and shared the responsibility of farming equally between males and females. They engaged in different occupational activities where farming was only a supplementary income. Sheep rearing was based on traditional mixed-crop integration practices and operated under limited or no input basis. The contribution of JLS to total earning of the farm was mainly through the sale of manure, which ranged from zero to 90% reflecting the great variation in the economic scale of farming. Most of the farmers used semi-intensive management practices whereas a few kept semi-nomadic large flocks.

The majority of farmers (>90%) provided only night housing. However, the sanitary condition of housing facilities was poor. The flock size varied widely and the average size was 27.06. According to the present study, male:female ratio in the breeding population of the entire JLS population in the peninsula was 1:14. The breed characteristics of the JLS assessed during the study were compared with those reported earlier for trends and variations. Accordingly, the JLS could be described as a small to medium sized animal with an angular body covered with short hair of white tan and black colours. The mean height at withers for mature rams and ewes were 64.70 ± 0.98 and 62.33 ± 0.56 cm, respectively. Age at first lambing was 16 months. Lambing interval was 6 and 12 months and life time production per ewe is about 7- 9 lambs. Owing to the closed breeding system practiced in the area, the population experiences a high rate of inbreeding with 0.184% inbreeding coefficient. The population trend and risk status estimated according to the FAO guidelines, revealed that the JLS population is an endangered breed having a negative population trend.

The findings of the present study indicated that the only indigenous sheep breed of Sri Lanka needs the immediate attention of authorities to ensure its sustainable utilization.