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THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE PIG FARMING SECTOR OF RURAL KWAZULU- NATAL: A CASE STUDY OF UTHUKELA DISTRICT

Sibongiseni Gcumisa

Farming Systems Research Section, Hilton

Email: sbongiseni.gcumisa@kzndae.gov.za

Introduction

This survey was carried out in the rural areas of uThukela District in KwaZulu-Natal of RSA to assess the status of pig farming and contribution of pig farming to the livelihood and fighting poverty in uThukela District. The study was motivated by the fact that no studies have been done to date to try and understand pig production in rural uThukela District. Furthermore, farmers were constantly raising concerns about issues such as the slow pig growth which was of concern. It was therefore evident that the whole sector needed to be investigated and understood if solutions to the constraints were to be found and to further improve pig production.

Materials and Methods

A farming systems approach was used in conjunction with a cross-sectional survey method using a structured questionnaire in face-to-face interviews with farmers for the collection of data. The study involved 4 local rural municipalities with a population of 4205 people who owned 2555 pigs. The sample size was 533 pig farmers/respondents. The data included the demographic characteristics of pig farmers, pig production and

management practices, the role of pigs in both the social and economic lives of people and the constraints and opportunities of pig farming. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics such as means, frequency tables, percentages, ANOVA and subjected to chi-square tests.

Results and Discussion

Farmers who are employed tend to own more pigs ($P < 0.05$). Likewise, the higher the education level of the farmer the more pigs they own ($P < 0.05$). Employed farmers are more likely to sell their pigs as compared to the unemployed. The unemployed mostly kept pigs for own or household consumption. In general, 63% keep pigs for household consumption and 33% use pigs as a source of income. With regard to gender, more females ($P < 0.05$) tended to rear pigs compared to their male counterparts. The majority of farmers (62 %) interviewed were over the age of 46 years. Indigenous or local breeds of pigs are still reared in the study area. An association between indigenous pigs and smaller litter size ($P < 0.05$) was demonstrated as well as between Large White and larger litter size ($P < 0.05$). The marketing of pigs is mostly done within the communities. With regard to feeding and feed types, the majority of the respondents (81%) use swill to feed their pigs, 16% feed commercial feed and 2% feed maize and vegetables. Farmers feeding commercial feed tend rear more pigs as compared to those who feed their pigs on swill, vegetables and maize ($P < 0.05$).

The present study shows that pigs play a significant role in the lives of the rural people mainly as a source of protein among the unemployed as opposed to being a source of income. Interventions to address proper feeding, housing and management of pigs are needed to assist the farmers realize the full potential of rearing pigs. Given that most pigs produced in the study area are marketed mostly in the area, it means that most pigs are slaughtered outside the abattoir. Therefore, future studies to investigate if this poses a health hazard to the local population are recommended.

Conclusion

The study concluded that pigs have a vital social and economic role in the lives of the rural people of KZN for income generation and household consumption. The main constraints are wide spread poverty and lack of management skills in pig production, nutrition, health, housing and management. Government intervention is necessary to help farmers to improve pig production and management as a means of poverty alleviation and household food security.

A number of areas that are of most importance for the Government to intervene include youth involvement, marketing of rural pigs, feeding, housing and application of good management. Youth need to be motivated to see importance of agriculture and this can be best achieved by educating the youth through bursaries to study in areas such as Cedara and OSCA College. Marketing of rural pigs has no formal market and thus slaughtering and handling of meat are not monitored therefore could be a potential source of zoonotic diseases. Government should not interfere with the local market but must develop standards and market places. KZNDAEA animal health technicians also need to mentor and observe the farmers on the required healthcare and biosecurity routines and educate farmers to curb potential disease spread.

Feed and housing require more investigation, cheaper alternative feeds for feeding rural pigs while meeting the required nutrients of the animal. Simpler, smaller and easily movable pig houses that can be used by farmers keeping few pigs need to be looked at as well. Finally, Government needs to train farmers on pig production practices, keeping financial and production record which are crucial especially to those that aim at making pig farming a business venture.