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Feeding Strategies for Sheep on Java, Stakeholders Perception on Feed Technology

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Abstract

In many farming systems the output of animals in terms of meat and milk is less than what could be expected based on on-station research in experimental conditions. This paper relates the results of an on-station trial that measured the effect of using urea molasses blocks (UMB) with expectations and perceptions about the technology by stakeholders in field conditions. Moreover, it reports animal performance under existing farming conditions and it summarizes results of meetings with farmers where the aims and economics of keeping animals was discussed. The on-station feeding trial with UMB were used as a supplement to a basal ration of elephant grass (*Pennisetum purpureum*) showed no effect on dry matter intake, liveweight gain and meat quality, while blood metabolites (blood urea nitrogen) showed significant differences as a result of three different levels of feeding. DMI ranged from 53 to 59 g/kg W0.75, CP intake from 6.6 to 7.5 g/kg W0.75, TDN intake from 29 to 33 g/kg W0.75. Average daily gain (ADG) ranged from 24 to 45 g/day and physical meat quality was judged the same for sheep in each treatment. Discussions with extensionists, farmers, butchers and housewives showed large differences in expectations about UMB feeding. The main reasons for non-adoption of UMB appear to be lack of awareness and high costs. The measurement of animal performance under on-farm feeding conditions without UMB showed that average liveweight gains were 0.029; 0.048; 0.055 kg/day for male sheep and 0.023; 0.027; 0.049 kg/day for female under grazing alone, without grazing and mixed production systems, respectively. Farmers used to feed different levels of locally available supplement, ranging from nothing to 0.3 kg/day/animal with a corresponding range of liveweight gains from 0.026 till 0.057 kg/day/animal. Economic analysis shows that if feeds are costed at market prices it seems to make no sense to supplement at all, unless the returns on meat are exceptionally good. On the other hand, the results of the tentative economic evaluation also showed that farmers supplement even when there seems to be no grounds for that. The economics of supplementation in general show remarkable results. Based on tentative extrapolations of the measurements it can be concluded that supplementation makes no economic sense unless the farmer has access to feeds with a very favourable ratio of cost to benefit and the price of supplementation relatively cheap compared to the meat. A situation that is unlikely to exist for small farmers in conditions distant from the market and low purchasing power of both farmers and consumers.

Keywords: Feeding strategies, on farm, on station, sheep