

EDITORIAL

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POLICY EVOLUTION IN THE ANIMAL SECTOR

India is a country of riches in terms of its abundant natural resources such as wide ranging agro- climate, land, water, bio-diversity and its socio-cultural history. The proof of its richness lies in the fact that it holds over one-seventh of the human beings inhabiting the earth and is one of the largest producers of agricultural and industrial products in addition to being the supplier of high quality human resources to the service and developmental sectors in all walks of life across the globe. Among the basic needs of human survival, namely, food, shelter and clothing, food is rightfully placed at the first and is the major criterion of quality and standard of human life. In a vast country such as India, every aspect of societal functions and governance is not necessarily well organized, though every effort is needed to make it so. In a way, a major policy formulation in farming was evolved when land ceiling of agricultural land was brought into effect with the objectives of equitableness of land distribution, security of livelihood of millions of Indian farmers living in the rural households and enhance production of productivity in farming. Another major policy initiative in the farming sector was to introduce high yielding and hybrid varieties of food grains which yielded much needed dividends through abundant success in the farm front. With food grain production slowing down in the later years and inadequate returns in the agricultural occupation, the governments at the centre and various states brought in yet another policy initiative in terms of farm diversification. Most of the farm sector is still unorganized, scattered and commercially limited to local markets. Though minimum support price is extended to farmers through procurement of food grains at regular intervals, the food storage facilities are inadequate and constitute a major disincentive to produce more food grains and distribute adequate and high quality grains to the consumers. Today, an average Indian farmer looks at farm diversification as a commercially feasible, profitable, alternate enterprise and is eager to utilize the land for commercial crops such as vegetables, sugar cane, cotton, plantains, flowers, plantation crops and orchards in place of food grains. At this juncture, one should not overlook the fact that though our country is self-sufficient and even surplus regarding food grains, we are grossly inadequate in the production of pulses and oilseeds.

Over the decades, agriculture was thought only in terms of primary crop production to produce commodities which are directly utilized for food to humans. Livestock and poultry sectors were almost taken for granted and allowed to be looked after by farmers themselves who were limited in terms of scientific knowledge and physical or financial resources to take care of them as primary occupations. Livestock reared primarily on crop residues and agricultural waste are not expected to be high producers of milk or meat, but could only minor, subsidiary components of a crop-dominated farming system. In spite of lack of positive policy interventions in the animal sector, the hidden potential of our farm livestock as a major farm occupation has come to light during the past few decades as revealed from the appreciable growth rates recorded in various animal based subsectors including, dairying, poultry and fisheries and also higher rate of return per unit land under confined and intensive rearing. The lack policy initiatives has not inhibited the growth in these sectors, particularly in the poultry since the private players in commercial farming contributed immensely to integrate farming with industry, thereby enabling tremendous success not only in production and productivity, but also in securing preventive health care. There have been several factor including onward linkages established for transport, cold chain, processing, marketing and endeavours of farmers' cooperatives which resulted in unprecedented increase in milk production for which the National Dairy Development Board and major private players in the dairy industry deserve due credit. In spite of an increase in milk production, the fact remains that productivity in the dairy sector continues to be poor for which one could only blame lack of forethought, policy initiatives and appropriate prioritization and planning. Among the livestock, naturally dairying deserves more attention than anything else, since it occupies over 65% of the animal husbandry of the country in value terms. Lack of such initiatives in small ruminants such as sheep and

goats and the omnivorous pigs has only caused negligence to these species in playing a significant role in fulfilling the qualitative and quantitative needs of the human diet. Even the buffaloes, which are held by India in largest numbers in the world, have not so far received the priority and attention which they deserve. A gleaming, refreshing, exceptional feature however, is the major initiatives taken up by the Government of Tamil Nadu recently in attempting to revitalise the animal sector by providing enormous material and technical support to the farmers engaged in animal farming. If one seriously considers the major path breaking intervention in policy making in the livestock sector as a whole, it was the decision to introduce artificial insemination in cattle and buffaloes through the key village scheme in early sixties, leaving still (rightly so) the choice of artificial insemination or natural service to the ultimate beneficiaries. This would lead us at least to list out certain areas where policy formulations need to be strongly made to enable decisions on time targeted goals and action plans.

1. Germplasm conservation and protection of indigenous livestock and poultry species
2. Cattle and buffalo breeding policy
3. Feed and fodder augmentation in cultivable holdings
4. Grassland management and community land development in support of livestock production
5. Establishment of intensive, commercial, automated, computerized large/medium/small scale production units
6. Right sizing of livestock numbers in the country
7. Control and eradication of livestock and poultry diseases in a prioritized manner
8. Meat processing through scientifically managed meat processing units and modern slaughter houses
9. Eradication of free roaming animals such as cattle, pigs and dogs in cities and towns coupled with establishment of animal welfare housing and rehabilitation of such animals
10. Veterinary and animal husbandry infrastructure (hospitals, farms, diagnostic, quality assurance labs) equipped with scientific, clinical and technical human resource deployment
11. Extension outreach to the doorsteps of the farmers and industrial entrepreneurs
12. Veterinary and para-veterinary educational and training reforms

The list is not exhaustive, but only illustrative. Any mechanism of individual intervention or expertise will not lead to any thing substantial in making major break-through in above areas. Institutional mechanisms are needed. If such institutions do not exist they need to be created. If existing institutions do not cater to the present and emerging needs, they need to be activated and reformed. We have grand and appropriately structured institutions in the form of Animal Husbandry Commissionerate at the Government of India level, Veterinary Council of India and State Veterinary Councils, Departments of Veterinary and Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services in every state and union territory and many veterinary and animal science universities and veterinary colleges, apart from ever so many professional bodies such as National Academy of Veterinary Sciences and professional associations dealing with specific subject matters. If we at least make a humble beginning by establishing standing committees and think tanks to apply their mind from time to time, governments and planners at the centre and the states can be suitably appraised and helped in bringing out clear-cut policy guidelines in the animal sector. We shall contemplate on this further.

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