

Editorial

India is the world's largest producer of milk with annual production of about 155.49 million tonnes (2015-16), most of which is consumed domestically by India's 1.2 billion largely vegetarian population for whom milk and milk products are an important part of food and nutritional security. India's dairy export is about 1 percent of the global dairy trade. The rise in per capita income, changing lifestyle, food habits, export opportunities have increased the demand for milk & milk products in the country. On the supply side too, owing to various breed development interventions being implemented and focussed approach expected to be adopted by state departments for implementing various strategies of dairy development across the country, milk production is expected to increase by 8.56% every year. The importance of dairying in a country like India hardly needs emphasizing. Dairying plays a major role in Indian rural economy. Dairying in India is more than a business; it has broader social and economic dimensions. About 70 million rural households are engaged in dairying, one of every two rural households with women playing a vital role. According to "Situation Assessment Survey", the livestock sector contributes significantly to rural income-about 26% in case of the poorest households and about 12% in case of overall rural income. Further, animal holding has been found to be more equitable as compared to land holding as 85% of the Indian farmers, who are marginal, and small, own only 45% of farm land but 75% of bovines. Within the Livestock sub-sector, dairying is an important economic activity accounting for about 67 percent of the value of output of the Livestock sub-sector in agriculture. The value of output of milk produced in the country (₹ 5,49,587 Cr in 2015-16) is higher than the value of output of wheat and paddy together. Though Dairying is more labour intensive than crop production, it provides a remunerative outlet for family labour. Ample labour and a small land base encourage farmers to practice dairying as an occupation subsidiary to agriculture. Further besides being a source of income for rural households, it also ensures nutritional security of the family addressing issues like malnutrition. Studies show that households owning milch animals in rural areas consume almost three times more milk than the families which are not into dairying. The Indian dairy sector is characterised more by 'production by masses' than 'mass production'. Unlike leading milk producing countries in the world, a large proportion (95%) of milk producers in the country hold 1 to 5 animals per household. The demand for milk hitherto has been met largely by huge numbers of cattle and buffaloes. However, limited availability of feed and fodder resources and implication of climate changes will not permit further increase in cattle and buffalo population in the country. On the other hand, the vast diverse population of cattle and buffaloes offers great prospects for increasing the milk production, as their productivity is relatively quite low. Thus, the only option to meet the growing demand for milk will be to increase the productivity of cattle and buffaloes and increase the ratio of productive animals in the overall bovine population.

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