

B-21: Botanical composition and nutritive value of pastures in natural grazing lands of Ratnapura district

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This study was conducted to evaluate the botanical composition and the nutritive value of pastures in natural grazing fields of Ratnapura District. The locations were selected based on the observations made regularly where the ruminant livestock generally graze. These locations include, road sides, school play grounds, shrub lands, coconut and fallow rice fields. Many samples were taken per location using a quadrat and plants were separated to determine the botanical composition. Another whole sample was taken for the analysis of nutritive value. Analyses were done in grasses and broad leaves separately and in combination for the proximate components and cell wall constituents. *In-vitro* dry matter and organic matter digestibilities were also determined. Broad leaved fodder had a higher nutritive values than the grass species. When taken as a combination the natural pastures were nutritionally superior to some of the monocultured improved grasses. Botanical composition was location specific. Locations of frequent defoliation were always dominated by the grass species. However, in drier months the dominant species were deep rooted broad leaves. Botanical composition of the locations such as road sides and play grounds are subjected to frequent loppings and therefore, the nutritive value was highly variable. However, these natural pastures in the common grazing fields serve enormous population of livestock in the area which are generally managed under free grazing system or tethered system. The supply of nutrients for the livestock under this situation is only sufficient for the maintenance of the animal.