

B-117 Smallholder dairy farming in "Kiralakelle marsh" in Matara district: a case study

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A case study was done to characterize the existing feeding systems with a view to improve nutritional aspects of neat cattle and buffaloes in "Kiralakelle marsh" in Matara district. Data was collected by interviewing 134 farmers (26 buffalo farmers and 108 neat cattle farmers) from 7 villages, using a structured questionnaire. The main feeding system for neat cattle was the cut and carry system when paddy fields were sown (83.5%) while feed was provided through grazing (86%) when the fields were fallow. The buffaloes were grazed in abundant and inundated paddy fields, which is a characteristic feature of their feeding system during both seasons (69% and 100% during cultivated and fallow periods, respectively). Although, most of the farmers believed that cattle got sufficient forage through the methods of feeding adopted, the findings indicated that it was not so. Farmers judged the intake of cattle by the time spent in grazing rather than by the actual quantities and the quality of forage grazed and made such basic wrong assumptions.

Results indicate that there is a good potential to improve nutrition through the introduction of leguminous tree fodder and straw in the existing feeding systems. Hence it is important to make the farmers aware of the benefits of tree fodder and straw feeding. The provision of drinking water *ad libitum*, minerals (at least common salt) etc. would further improve the production of cattle.