B-139: Nutritive value of common forage species collected from inundated paddy fields in Nilwala basin

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Proximate analyses, dry matter digestibility (DMD), total digestible nutrients (TDN) and metabolizable energy (ME kj/kg) of 12 common Nilwala forage species were determined. All the tested species were common rice field weeds belonging to Poaceae and Cyperaceae sub families.

The dry matter (DM) content of the species showed significant ($p<0.05$) variations (9.75%-33.3%). The crude protein content ($p<0.05$) ranged from 4.94% to 10.5% while majority of the species had more than 7% crude protein which is critical for rumen microbial activities The DMD (40%-67%), TDN (38%-64%) and ME (1.39-2.34 kj/kg) values had wide variations and were significantly different ($p<0.05$) from each other. Crude protein and crude fibre contents of tested species were not related ($r^2= -0.14$, $n=24$). Crude fibre and DMD value of *Poacea* species showed a high ($p<0.05$) negative correlation ($r^2= - 0.73$, $n=24$).

Indications are that, the nutritive value of the common forages could maintain only an existing subsistence level of production. Such a feeding system could be easily improved by using available low inputs such as, rice straw, tree fodder, minerals etc. To this end it is important to make farmers aware of the benefits of proper nutrition to enhance the present level of production for a higher income.