

A Case Study on Free Range Poultry Rearing Sector in the Matara District

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Production performance, potentials and constraints of the free range poultry sector in the Matara District were studied. 45 farmers engaged in free-range poultry farming were randomly selected from nine Grama Niladari divisions in three Divisional Secretariat areas of the Matara district. The mean flock size was 6 ± 2.09 . Free range poultry sector mainly utilizes family labor. 47% of the studied poultry units were cared by housewives and 17% units were cared by children after school. No farmer considered free range chicken as the main occupation. 62% farmers kept chicken only while the remaining 38% farmers reared other livestock such as goat, cattle and buffalo with chicken.

Birds reared under free range system were mainly allowed to scavenge free range. Many farms (42%) did not provide any form of shelter for chickens while 38% farmers provided tree-top shelters for birds. 13% farmers provided the chicken a house with litter. No farmer used intensive rearing system for the village chicken. Houses were very poor in condition and were mainly built with locally available materials. Only one farmer had constructed a house with a cemented floor.

Provision of feed and water was observed to be not satisfactory. 85% of the farmers believed that village chicken are capable of getting their nutrient requirement by scavenging, hence, the main feeding method was scavenging (88%). 64% of the respondents did not use feeders or water for their birds. Materials such as scattered grains from threshing fields, left-over grains and pulses, broken rice, kitchen waste, green grass, left over boiled rice, maize grains and combs, fish scraps and coconut poonac were the main feed resources. Specific rations were not used for different classes of chicken. 88% of the farmers did not provide water at all for chicken. In general production performance was low compared to commercial situations mainly because of poor genetic potential and management practices. Coccidiosis, cannibalism and reduced appetite were the main diseases/disorders found. Cannibalism was

seen in 68% of the farms. Farmers rely on traditional knowledge and local pharmacist when birds were to be treated.

It was revealed that free range chicken sector plays an important role in rural economy by utilizing idle family labor while providing food security. Lack of capital and land, poor farmer knowledge, extension service, housing facilities and feeding were the major constraints of free range chicken sector.