

IRAQI BUFFALO STATUS AND PERSPECTIVES

Jabbar Al-Saedy¹, Khalid Al-Fartosi²

¹ Former Manager of Buffalo Department, Ministry of Agriculture, Iraq

² Biology Department, College of Science, Thi-Qar University, Iraq

1. HISTORY AND POPULATION

There are many ideas regarding the back history of water buffalo in Iraq, the dominant one was that buffaloes had been domesticated since third millennium B.C. in Mesopotamia during Sumerian Era (Zuener,1963; Sousa,1983).

Buffaloes is considered one of the animals that has wide spread in the marshes area in the south of Iraq. There is no house in the marshes area don't have it. Buffaloes lived with circumstances of the environment. It is considered as the main source for living the people of marshes. It was considered as a source of insurance for care taker and his family to face the requites in that area. The buffalo isn't get the sufficient importance in the past either by centers of investigation or by the agriculture offices or by veterinary organizations (Al-Fartosi, 2010). The latest Iraqi buffalo population is estimated about 285,537 head and distributed on 15 provinces with highest percent on the Basra province in south marshes (57704 head), Thi-Qar province (49283 head), Baghdad (47809 head mainly in fadiliaya village in the east boundary of the capital) and Missan province (24345 head) (MOA, 2008).

The number of buffaloes in Iraq was 250 thousand head in the middle of the last century, and was a source of livelihood for a large segment of the rural population and especially the inhabitants of the marshes.

However, and due to political and economic circumstances experienced by Iraq during the last five decades, from wars, draining the marshes, economic blockade and removal of subsidies on feed, and thus migration of buffalo farmers from the South part to other regions in middle and north parts of Iraq, for more water and fodder is cheap, that number has dropped dramatically (Alsaedy, 2007).

In addition to the low number of buffalo, productivity of milk and meat have been reduced, which led to the inability of local production of red meat and dairy products to meet the increasing demand for these products, increasing demand due to the increase in population, rising

per capita incomes and high rates of urbanization. Too little research and studies have been held compared to some other farm animals and most of that research has been conducted in private stations established for this purpose.

2. PRESENT STATUS

The population of buffaloes in Iraq at 1960-1970 was 250000, they declined for many reasons as before reported.

The management pattern of buffalo herd is private sector with small holders ranging between 5 and 50, with some herd more than 150 head.

The objectives of buffaloes keeping are:

Fresh milk and thick cream (Gymair) production. Males are used for slaughtering after weaning others males are used for reproduction (natural), there's no artificial insemination neither semen collection and breeding depend on breeders skills only. The reproduction season begins at the end of autumn and the most of calving takes place to the end of summer. The mortality of calves is 10% and adult mortality is 5%, due to feed shortage and absence of state support for concentrates. Therefore many buffalo keepers slaughter their females and many others change their jobs.

Buffaloes suffer from low reproductive efficiency (hypo fertility)with high percent of uterine abnormality, hemorrhagic septicemia, foot and mouth disease and brucellosis which contributed in decline rate of population (MOA, 2006) .

The other problem in our buffalo industry is the difficulty in the products marketing especially in marsh land far from the city center (no milk collection dealers, no milk plants).

The performance of our adult buffalo female is 6 liters milk per day, with lactation length of 250 days and 7.95% fat. We have a good daily weight gain in feedlots up to 780 g (Jumma, 1997).

The biggest challenge in buffalo industry in Iraq is the loose and absence of infrastructure of buffalo raising, especially three big problems:

1. Absence of farmers' own land for agriculture purpose to support feed shortage, most farmers in Iraq have illegal lands for buffalo raising.

2. Absence of milk plants to receive farmers' milk that leads to loss of the products especially in hot seasons.

3. Common outbreak of diseases hemorrhagic septicemia (H.S), Brucellosis, and foot and mouth disease (FMD), especially in south marshes in Iraq, without strict preventive measures.

3. PERSPECTIVE

After American occupation, exactly in 2006, the Ministry of Agriculture was going to establish the department of water buffalo in 2008, as the first step in history of Iraq to develop this ancient indigenous animal, so there are many achievements made by this department as below:

1. Four national centers will be established in recent five years at four provinces in capital (Baghdad), north (Nineveh), south (Thi-Qar) and Euphrates area (Najaf). The main purpose for these buffalo centers will be the updating of Iraqi buffalo informations by conducting many researches in all fields that are uncovered by Iraqi researchers.

2. Support the buffalo farmers by concentrates and free veterinary services.

3. Hold Annual Conference to discuss the new buffalo researches from all over the country.

4. Establish a new Iraqi buffalo farmers association (GILGAMMOS) to connect with others in the world.

5. International Buffalo Federation (IBF) membership with national focal point.

6. Support buffalo farmers all over the country, with facilitated loans to develop farms.

7. Apply biotechnology researches to develop buffalo introducing new genetic resources, which begins with researches in Baghdad. Too, many researches were performed on water buffalo in marshes of Iraq after 2003, related with comprehensive studies for water buffalo in provinces of south of Iraq, M.Sc. thesis related with physiology and ecology of water buffaloes, some researches on hormones and lipid profile of buffaloes.

Beside all these important steps to develop our buffalo, also we need the urgent cooperation and support from developers, researchers and national organization deal with this animal, and we think that our buffalo has a good potential profits, quite similar to the others in advanced countries, still we need more time and ongoing hard plans to discover.

4. REFERENCES

1. Al-Fartosi, K. G. (2010). The role of buffaloes breeding in the development of nation's economic. The first conference of Iraqi buffaloes. Ministry of Agriculture, Iraq, 22/12/2010.
2. AL-Saedy, J. (2007). Iraqi buffalo now. Proceeding 8th World Buffalo Congress. Oct. 19-22, Caserta, Italy. It. J. Anim. Sci., 6 (suppl. 2): 1234-1236.
3. Jumma, K. H. (1997). Present status of Iraqi buffalo, Buffalo J., (2) :103-113.
4. M.O.A. Ministry of Agriculture. (2008) . National livestock census.
5. M.O.A. Ministry of Agriculture. (2006). State of Veterinary Service. Department of public health archives. Baghdad, Iraq.
6. Sousa .A. (1983). History of Mesopotamian civilization. Baghdad, Iraq, Vol. 1: 572. Zuener. (1963). History of domesticated animal, London. Uk.



Buffaloes in South Iraq