

“PINK REVOLUTION” IN KERALA HIGH TIME FOR STRINGENT PLAN OF ACTION

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More than ninety five percent of Keralites consume meat and generally have very few taboos for the type of meat they consume. The per capita consumption of meat is highest in Kerala compared to other states in India. The high literacy rates, improved socio economic status, increased awareness about the nutritional requirements for healthy life could be some of the reasons for high meat consumption in Kerala. The daily consumption of meat in Kerala is estimated to be 5,034.96 tonnes. However, the daily domestic meat production is only 264.31 tonnes. There is a very huge gap between the production and consumption indices, which is often bridged by importing meat and meat animals from the neighbouring states?

The agro climatic conditions of Kerala are highly favourable for increasing meat production and bridging this huge gap. It could also be a profitable and stable opportunity that could be leveraged for long term advantage of the animal husbandry sector of Kerala. Thus the meat industry in Kerala has greater potential for growth than any other related sectors. It could be observed that the dairy sector in Kerala, which had been attracting majority of the resources for decades had reached a stage of marginal returns and do not justify increasing investments, owing to many factors. The current policies and resources of the state should also be aimed at meat production, in

order to make advantage of the opportunities to increase rural employment and also for making the best use of the state' resources. This could only be achieved through a well planned, systematically structured and implemented “Pink revolution”. Further negligence in setting up policies towards the meat industry and reallocating precious resources from dairy sector would be grave mistake, leading to a failing dairy sector irrespective of continued investments, and undeveloped but potentially lucrative meat sector.

The animal husbandry sector has to be led from the front to help the farmers to reap the maximum benefit from this situation. Meat industry reaps immediate and more assured returns as compared to dairy sector. The social, economic and agricultural situation in Kerala had undergone remarkable changes and it is high time to alter the policies to the changed circumstances. The sector warranting a comprehensive plan to tackle the issues that may arise and can be revolutionized with stringent measures that are closely linked, as:

1. Improving the competitiveness of the sector
2. Organization of the sector
3. Institutional support for the industry

Improving The Competitiveness Of The Sector

The cattle breeding policies in Kerala from the very beginning had been focused on milk production alone catering to the socio-

economic and market conditions prevailing at that time. The conditions had undergone profound changes and it is high time to modify the policies to the changed circumstances.

The breeding policies in livestock sector are aimed at producing animals with better milch characteristics, totally neglecting the meat qualities. The policies should be refocused to accommodate the meat sector as well. It should be considered as an independent sector rather than a subsidiary sector. Animals both native and crossbreds needs to be introduced with the aim of inheriting dual or beef characteristics, to the cattle population in the state. At present, there is no meat or dual purpose breeds of cattle in Kerala that are being propagated, and whatever meat produced usually comes from old, unproductive milch animals or from male animals reared for draught purpose, which are tougher and inferior in quality compared to the meat from beef cattle.

Along with these changes, steps should be taken to supply good quality meat to consumers. Meat consumers around the globe are increasingly demanding animal welfare in every aspect of rearing, handling, transportation and slaughtering. Humane slaughtering of animals must be adhered to minimize the animal sufferings. This increases the acceptance of the meat produced and assures superior quality meat and meat produces. Meat inspection by qualified persons and supervision by professionals on every aspect of meat processing should be made mandatory. This ensures clean meat production and prevents adulteration as well.

Meat and meat produces fetch really good prices in the market as the people in state have preferences for better quality products. All unauthorised slaughter houses should be banned by enforcement of law. An authorised most modern slaughter house should be built in every block panchayaths, with facilities to utilise the by-products and better disposal of waste. Large infrastructure is required to

maintain cold chains during marketing of meat. The installation cost incurred can be revived from the people merchandise meat and utilizing the facilities. The meat production and marketing should be under the guidance of National Meat and Poultry Processing Board (NMPPB) or similar organisations. This ensures hygienic meat production, preventing environmental contamination, scientific processing of meat and value added meat products, maintaining cold chain, and better meat safety. This along with proper surveillance and measures to prevent diseases of international concern may help in capturing more foreign markets thus providing more leverage to the growth of the industry. Measures to improve size and capacity of beef farms need to be taken urgently to reap the benefits of scale and thereby improving competitiveness.

Organization of the sector

Even though the animal husbandry sector in Kerala is currently built around small holders, who own one or two animals, the milk production is highly organised through co-operatives. However, the processing and marketing of meat is highly localized. This highly localized nature of meat industry puts it as a disadvantage to grow and reap the benefits of economies of scale. Moreover, the small size of individual business makes it impossible for them to adopt innovative technologies in processing and also in proper marketing of the products. One way to tackle this issue is to promote co-operatives for marketing meat and meat products. Another obvious way is to promote farming for meat though medium sized enterprises, irrespective of the forms that are promoted for this, great care should be taken for ensuring the quality of the products, which is critical to have recognition for the industry and also for the health of the public.

It is also important to keep track of the changing trends in the industry and to align our

products and resources along with it. Recent trends in meat industry reveal the facts that there is high demand for chevon (meat from goat) in Kerala, usually referred incorrectly as mutton, which stands for meat from sheep. There are positive signs that the organized and small unorganised farms are stepping into this arena. Adequate support should come from the animal husbandry sector to promote this. Similar is the case with Kara beef (Buffalo meat), which has enormous market, just because of its qualities and, consuming kara beef is not a religious taboo. This is a very promising sector and can contribute to a great extent as we own 50% of world buffalo population. Recent trends also show high demand in meat of rabbits and turkeys.

Another field of importance is the broiler sector. The last decade indices show that the flooding of poultry and its products from the neighbouring states had led to economically unviable poultry farming in our state. The once flourishing poultry industry in the state has failed as it was rendered uncompetitive as a result of high cost of production, when compared to the farms in the neighbouring states. Now farmers act only as middlemen in marketing of poultry and poultry products from other states. Strong steps should be taken to rejuvenate the poultry industry in the state. Initially, it should come in the form of feed subsidies, free electricity, and relaxation of tax in related forms, until the sector seems to

sustain by its own. Imposing tax on poultry and related products, moving in from neighbouring states and strict measures to prevent unlawful movement across the borders is essential to ensure the viability of this sector.

Institutional Support For The Industry

Access to adequate credit at appropriate times is an important factor that needs attention. Animal Husbandry Department should also focus on this and ensure that the farmers have easy access to financial institutions and banks for availing funds for the development and successful operations of the farming activities. Moreover, the programme undertaken by the Local Self Governments and the state should aim at sustainable growth in the sector. Therefore adequate care must be taken so that, every project would contribute to the sustainable growth in the sector rather than adhoc activities without any tangible results.

Stringent plans for the control and eradication of diseases of animals that hinder the flow of meat and meat products from the state to foreign markets should be framed. This provides better leverage for the growth of meat industry in the state

Strategic planning, implementation and strict measures, along with synchronization of other related activities should make the pink revolution happen, providing maximum benefits to the farmers of the state.. ■