Dairy Production in Kerala: A Swot Analysis

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Dairying in Kerala is at crossroads. Dwindling land hold ings, inadequate feeds and fodder, stressful climatic factors and others have made the enterprise less viable. Nonetheless, it has inherent potential to stand up to the odds, given all the players in the sector sit up and take notice of the things and chalk out a brighter course for the sector. A SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) of the sector is made to this effect.

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A. Strengths:

Kerala is the only state with more than 70 per cent of its cattle population as cross-breds. Thanks to the efforts of early policy maker and Indo-Swiss project to improve the low productive, non-descript indigenous cattle. Such a cattle population base is surely strength if concerted efforts are made to sustain and further their productivity. Besides, it is heartening that the state is having a relatively better health, breeding services and research infrastructure. The average veterinary institutions per 1000-cattle is 0.19 as against 0.10 of all India (GOI, 1997). An independent livestock development board KLDB- is a shot in the arm. Research needs are fulfilled buy the scientists of Veterinary College, Mannuthy and Regional Research Stations of K.A.U. Marketing of milk is efficiently managed by MILMA. All these are definitely a good base for the sector. However, only an effective co-ordination among these institutions can churn out something worthful. To what extent co-ordination is prevailing? For instance, Lady Veterinary Surgeons of A.H.D. of Kerala perceived less opportunities to get guidance from sister organizations (Manjunatha, 1998). In this context can we find respite by blaming the inherent flaws in the system, which are ubiquitous in Indian Administration? We need to think and act now to convert these strengths in to opportunities and benefits.

B. Weaknesses:

A small uneconomical land holding is one of the major constraints faced by agriculture and animal husbandry. Majority of the farms are homestead type operating on few ten cents yielding income for subsistence or even less. In such a case, integrated farming combining animal component like cow, goat, pig, fish, poultry, with crop with little portion allocated to fodder or fodder intercultured with plantation crop, a biogas plant, etc. will enable effective and efficient utilization of limited land resources. Especially, cow-biogas-crop integration would reduce the psychological ill feelings that dairying is uneconomical besides providing fuel, fresh milk and regular income. Seasonal fodder scarcity is yet another constraint. Frames may not find fodder cultivation for dairying in summer as a better alternative to lucrative spice and plantation crops. The panacea for this problem is to follow a bunch of strategies ranging from effective utilization of feed and crop residues like chopping, construction of mangers, proper collection, processing, storage, enrichment of straw, etc., to use of silvipasture and non-conventional feeds, to advanced technologies like use of UMBs, by-pass protein, enzymes, growth promoters, etc. Hot and humid climate of the state favours germ proliferation of pathogenic germs and para-

sitic infestations, and aflatoxin production in feeds and is posing certain limitations for maintenance of health of animals, High incidence of mastitis, babesiosis, theileriosis, intestinal parasitism, etc, is sequel to this. Shift in approach from curative to preventive by educating the farmers about good management practices and ensuring their adoption would contain these limitations.

C. Opportunities:

Though various marketing channels fulfill demand for milk in the state with MILMA taking the lead, the flush season flood of milk hitherto remains a problem. Product diversification, a best option to tackle this problem is not completely explored. We can take a leaf from North India's experience. Come Holy, Diwali, Dashera or other festivals the milk based sweet industry works overnight to meet the demand. Over two dozen varieties of milk based sweets can be found in the sweet meat stalls in addition to paneer, curd and lassi churned and prepared on the spot as our "chhaya (tea)". The average milk consumption in Punjab is 750ml as against less than 220 ml in Kerala. Here lies the ingenuity of the state vets to launch a low intensity long-term campaign to popularise milk and milk baded products. It could even include strategies like promoting tea and coffee with more milk as whitener; selecting few entrepreneurs from all over the state and getting them trained in the sweet industry of North India; sending a team to study the consumption pattern / behaviour of milk and milk based products in the North India, etc.

Literate, well-informed and economically motivated youth including those trained in Vocational Higher Secondary Schools is invaluable human resources to be tapped. In addition to involving them on dairy farming per se, many can be trained to establish forward and backward linkages to the production process. Say, in production of molasses enriched straw blocks, UMB (Urea Molasses Blocks), small scale feed production units, artificial insemination services, raisiong calves for sale, milking of animals (milking machine on motor cycle) procurement of milk on behalf of the society on commission basis, home delivery of milk, milk based sweet industry, etc. These ideas should be implemented on pilot basis and then systematized.

One more recent development that can be best utilised for the good of the dairy sector is Self Help Movement. Self Help Groups (SHGs) are informal voluntary associations of people (usually poor, that too women with similar traits like caste, economic class, etc.) formed to attain a collective goal or development activity. Many SHGs practising saving and credit along with other acivities, including Income Generation Programmes (IGPs) have been recognised as instrument of delivering rural credit. NGOs and banks have taken lead in promoting these groups. NABARD alone has drawn up a plan of linking one million groups by the year 2008 and covering 1/3rd of the poor rural households in India (NABARD, 1999). Almost all the Govt. rural development programmes including SGSY (Swarna Jasyanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (IRDP renamed)), RMK (Rastriya Mahila Kosh) have been following group approach.

Here comes the role of Verterinarians to give all the logistic support and training to those SHGs taking up animal husbandry as IGP. A range of options from input supply to production to output disposal (as mentioned earlier) should form the IGPs. Group approach can solve many of the problems faced by the dairy industry. A few examples will speak by themselves the power of group approach. A SHG promoted by the PRAWARDHA, a NGO in Bidar of Karnataka has established its own chilling and packaging plant and markets the milk on its own. Similarly, 25 SHGs, promoted by State Bank of India, Pavinjur, Kancheepuram district of Tamil Nadu utilized the loan amount collectively for purchasing a milk van to reduce the cost of their own milk to be transported to chilling centre (25 kms) besides earning an income of rupees 1000 per day as hire charges by transporting others milk also. Why move outside for examples, our own KHDP-Kerala Horticulture Development Programme is an unique success of SHG movement.

The role of NGOs in dairy sector needs no explanation. The efforts of Nirmal Gram Vanitha Dairy Central Society, Idukky, "the milk bowl of Kerala"' People's Dairy Development Programme, Kaladi, Malanad Dairy Society, Peermed Dairy Development Society and others is well recognised. Reckoning all these a very strong Entrepreneurship Development Team (EDT) comprising of individuals with leadership qualities and inclination to work with people and

NGOs, from all parts of the state may be formed. These EDT members would act as community mobilisers on selected innovative projects on pilot basis, based on the results, could be replicated on large scale. This would indeed be more a participatory approach to development.

Decentralization of governance is a phenomenon accepted world-wide (Somanathan, 2001). Nevertheless, our groomed, bureaucratic mindset in many ways clashes with the rustic leadership styles of the local people's representatives. Still local decision making system and budget allocations has a say in dairy sector, which needs to be favourable. It is sure that innovative development projects (other than mere transfer of animals between hands) pushed with perseverance will prevail over the local self-interests. Decentralization of power also permits to extend our cause to intersectional planning, such as, agriculture, fisheries, watershed development, public health, public works, co-operation, insurance, etc. The animal husbandry component can be highlighted and plans influenced to profit the livestock sector. Building a core team of experts in inter-sectorial planning would be a futuristic step.

D. Threats:

We are moving from simple contended life style to complex ambitious one. In that process dairying too is pushed into an economic foul play with un-even level playing field. Many developments like conversion of lands to plantation crops and real estate, influx of milk from neighbouring states and liberalization of dairy industry are against its success. At this juncture, evolving 'low cost production alternative' with production of international standard products only can counteract these threats. This calls for both the farmers and professionals to shift themselves to participatory research mode rather than working in isolation. Besides they should prevail upon the Govt. to protect the industry by favourable policies. On the other side, interest in farming (including dairying) is declining given the seemingly colourful alternative jobs in the consumerist market. Economic viability has become sole criteria to involve in a vocation. Farming as a way of life, nuturing the nature and being natured by it, which is more sustainable has no takers with changing attitude and life styles. A "value addition" to dairying is badly required. It is time to join hands with organic farming activists, environmentalists, and like-minded organizations, individuals back to bring back the declining pride.

The ghost of liberalization is haunting all of us indirectly. Under the guidance of world financial institutions budgetary restraints are exercised by the Governments of developing countries contributing to (i) reduced public sector services (ii) experimentation with new service delivery structures, including growing interest in privatisation (Rivera and Guftafson, 1991). In tune with the same thinking Prabhaharan (2000) finds that 60-80 per cent budget allocation is consumed by servies and thus operational efficiency of the government livestock services are declining. He opines that health care, veterinary drugs, feed and post harvest technology may be feasibly undertaken by the private sector with some degree of Govt. interventions. In this context deliberations at highest level are going on to privatise veterinary health and breeding services in India. For instance Ahuja *et al.,* (2000) have studied the willingness to pay of livestock farmers in Kerala, Rajasthan and Gujarat and have concluded that privatisation is ineviable so as to provide veterinary sevices to the farmers efficiently and effectively. From the economic point of view these could be break through reforms, what about for the poor veterinarians? Lobbying in the guise of social sector becomes weak unless it really contributes to the state GDP. This implies that we invariably should make livestock sector economically viable.

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