



Increasing the productivity and market options of smallholder beef cattle farmers in Vanuatu

Overview

Approximately 75% of households in Vanuatu rely on traditional subsistence agriculture for their livelihoods, with approximately 50% of rural households having cattle. Despite favourable environmental, climatic and market settings for beef cattle production in Vanuatu, beef cattle turnoff into formal markets has declined in recent years with butchers and abattoirs unable to meet increasing demand for beef.

The Government of the Republic of Vanuatu has identified increased smallholder cattle productivity, linkages with the commercial cattle sector and income from cattle sales as priority strategies to increase national beef production, meet expanding market opportunities and to improve the livelihoods of ni-Vanuatu smallholder households.

This project will carry out research and activities with community leaders, smallholder households and the commercial cattle sector to gain an understanding of smallholder households and existing cattle production systems. This knowledge will assist the project team in devising strategies to increase cattle productivity and improve market access within the smallholder cattle sector in Vanuatu.

ACIAR project number	LPS/2014/037
Start date and duration (years)	October 2015, 4 years
Location	Vanuatu
Budget	\$1.85 million

Project leader(s) and Commissioned Organisation

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Partner country project leaders and their institutions

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Research

The overall aim of the project is to increase the productivity and marketing options of smallholder cattle farmers in Vanuatu through a range of social, business and production participatory research, demonstration and training activities.

The objectives of the project are to:

- » Describe the economic, policy and social settings within which smallholder cattle farmers operate and their livelihood objectives and strategies.
- » Sustainably increase beef production of smallholder households through change in on-farm management practices.
- » Increase the returns to smallholder cattle farmers through whole-farm and cattle enterprise economic analysis, business training and marketing interventions.
- » Create pathways to sustain and extend project outcomes and impacts beyond the scope of the current project.

To meet these objectives the project is using a mobile digital system for data collection with smallholder cattle farmers on Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu.

Using a tablet, the researcher collects information about the household, household members, the farm and individual animals. Using farm maps, individual animal performance and value data can be generated and provided back to farmers in near real-time allowing them to make on-the-spot management and marketing decisions. Quantitative data is also used to identify households suitable for more in-depth interviews and data collection.

Achievements

Baseline livelihoods surveys have been conducted to identify the motivation for smallholders to raise cattle and the role these play in livelihoods.

A project group has been established for women interested in cattle farming. Meetings are held regularly and provide an opportunity to plan project activities and evaluate farmer's perceptions of project activities.

Indicators of individual animal and herd productivity are generated twice yearly—at the end of the wet and dry seasons. This measure provides an understanding of the size and quality of participating smallholder cattle herds.

Forage (grass and herbaceous and tree legume) evaluation and demonstration trials have been established on-station and on-farm. On-station grazing and supplementation trials are in preparation and in the future, biological and economic analysis of the trials will be carried out.

Economic models for cattle and farm management have been generated through in-depth interviews. The models will assist farmers with their farm planning and business management.

The project has also built the capacity of Vanuatu's researchers. A member of the in-country research team visited Australia for and received training to carry out surveys using the Mobile Acquired Data (MAD) methodology. Two additional researchers from Vanuatu delivered presentations at *TropAg2017* in Brisbane. They also visited several cattle production enterprises, cattle auctions and beef wholesalers in Queensland. g and Faculty of Food Technology, VNUA.