

Beef production in the arid and semi-arid lands of Kenya: Constraints and prospects for research and development

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Outlook on Agriculture, Volume 35, Number 3, September 2006 , pp. 217-225(9)

Abstract:

Most of Kenya (80%) is classified as arid and semi-arid. The climatic conditions in these regions are so harsh for crops that only livestock production can thrive. These regions provide the bulk of beef consumed in the country, which is produced via two main systems: large-scale dairy-meat commercial ranching and small-scale dairy-meat production. In both these systems, production is pasture-based. The animals kept are the highly adapted indigenous zebu (small East African zebu and Boran) or exotic beef (for example, Hereford, Simmental, Charolais, Angus) breeds and their crosses kept mainly by the commercial ranchers. Development of the beef industry in Kenya has lagged behind other agricultural enterprises due to policies that were unfavourable towards arid and semi-arid lands and the historically poor infrastructure development in the rangelands. It is concluded that there is potential for beef production in Kenya, given the available genetic and physical resources, although this potential can be achieved only if government policies are introduced to accelerate development in the rangelands and empower both the larger producers and pastoralists to increase their production.