

FEEDING MANAGEMENT STATUS OF MANIPURI PONY

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the present study is to generate research based information on the various feeding practices followed by Manipuri Pony owners, by conducting systematic survey in the breeding tract. During the survey, 215 pony owners and farmers in 3 districts were interviewed using well prepared questionnaire. The study revealed that about 36.28% of the animals got their feeds under open grazing practices almost throughout the year while another 36.28% of the pony owners were found to practice tethering-cum-open grazing system. 27.44% of the owners maintained their animals, only on tethering during daytime. It was known that 44.60% of the Pony owner supplemented procured green grass to the tethered animals 1-2 times daily. The farmers usually supplied 2 bundles (15kg) of rice straw 1-2 times daily per adult animal, after being cut and soaked in water and 95.57% gave rice bran in soaked form only during scarcity period, generally by mixing with rice straw. It was also reported that the Pony owners didn't provide oilcakes and as such protein source is almost completely lacking in the ration. The study revealed that Manipuri Pony were kept by and large on zero input feeding system, depending almost solely on indigenous green grasses grown in the breeding tract and on rice straw produced from the cultivation of paddy.

Key words: Manipuri Pony, Open grazing, tethering-cum-open grazing, tethering.

Among the distinct breeds of horse and pony in India, the Manipuri Pony, the reputed horse breed, belongs to the state of Manipur. The breed is well known as a perfect Pony for the royal game of Polo. The demand for these animals is high in the north eastern region and rest of areas of the country as one of the most suitable pack pony in the hilly terrains. However the population of this magnificent animal is decreasing

at an alarming rate². As per 17th Quinquennial Livestock Census, the population of the breed recorded was only 1893¹. In view of small population size, the need of the hour is to take up holistic approach to conserve this precious animal without delay.

The present status of Manipuri Pony with respect to its population, including various factors causing the reduction of population, existing feeding management status in the field, utility pattern is not yet documented under any systematically conducted survey based research studies. No research-based information in scientific literature could be traced until recently. Further, information on the feeding system of a breed is an important tool in planning proper management of a breed in a sustainable way. Hence, an attempt has been made to generate detailed research based information on the various feeding practices

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followed by Manipuri Pony owners, by conducting systematic survey in the breeding tract.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

During the survey, 36 villages were visited in 3 districts, depending on the availability of Manipuri Pony population. Pony owners and farmers (215) were interviewed using well prepared questionnaire. The data were collected by personal interview through an interview schedule. Various questions relating to grazing practices, green grass supplementation to the tethered animals, feeding dry fodder, feeding feed supplements, feeding methods etc. were asked to the Pony owners and farmers as per the questionnaires prepared in this respect. Detailed questions on the quantity of feeds as well as schedule of feeding were also asked to the pony owners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Open grazing

From this survey, it was revealed that those animals which are completely let loose almost throughout the years (extensive system) fulfilled their daily requirements through grazing in the nearby community lands or adjoining low lying areas near lakes, river banks, streams etc. Sometimes, some animals used to wander to the roadside, market places and garbage dumping areas and consumed spoiled feedstuffs, fruits, vegetables, pineapple peels etc and in the process there was high possibility of eating plastic materials through consuming the above items. This survey revealed that about 36.28 % of the animals (Table 1) got their feeds in this way. Such feeding practices were usually seen among urban based pony owners. This might be due to the lack of grazing land and also difficulty of pony owners to stall fed their animals owing to their poor socio-economic condition.

Tethering-cum-open grazing

Results presented in Table 1 revealed that another 36.28 % of the pony owners were found to practice tethering-cum-open grazing system. During cropping season, owners usually tethered their animals at day time and kept at stable during night. The animals were supplemented with procured green grass to feed their animals. After

the harvesting was over, usually from December to May of the year, the animals were again freed and reared only on grazing.

Tethering system

The remaining 27.44 % of the pony owners (Table 1) tethered their animals during day time and tied during night hours. The animals in this system, managed part of their feeding requirements through grazing during day time. In the evening hours, they are given procured green grasses to supplement so as to fulfill their daily requirement. Such feeding practices are usually seen during the cropping months among owners living in rural areas of Imphal West, Imphal East and most of the pony owners of Thoubal Districts. Prevalence of such feeding practices in these areas might be to prevent damage to cultivated crops including paddy during cropping season and common green vegetables grown in scattered areas during non-cropping season.

Supplementing green grasses to the tethered animal

With regard to schedule for supplementing procured green grass to the tethered animals, it was observed from (Table 1) that 44.60% of pony owner provided 1-2 times and 41.73% of them supplied 2-3 times on daily basis while 13.67% of owners supplemented more than 3 times. The survey also revealed that approximately 25-45 Kg of green grasses was provided daily per adult animal.

Feeding dry fodder

It was also found that the schedule of feeding dry fodder (Table 1) was 1-2 times among 61.48% of the pony owners and 2-3 times in 28.15%, while 10.37% of the owners provided more than 3 times. As regards to the quantity of straw, the farmers usually supplied 2 bundles (15kg) of rice straw daily per adult animal, after being cut and soaked in water. The dry fodder was generally supplemented, during the period when green grasses were not available or procured, particularly during winter and heavy monsoon rains.

Feeding supplementation (Rice bran)

Regarding rice bran feeding (Table 2), it was revealed from the survey that, 95.57% of the Pony owners gave rice bran in soaked form while 4.03

% of owners supplied after cooking. It was also known that rice bran was not routinely fed to the animals and it was supplemented only during scarcity period during cold winter and heavy monsoon days.

With regard to the feeding combination, it was observed that rice bran was given with cut and

soaked rice straw by 87.90% of pony owners while 12.10 % of owners fed rice bran along with green grass. It was provided 1-2 times daily with a total amount varying from 1-3 Kg per day depending upon owner's ability and his economic status.

Table No. 1 Management : Feeding practices- Grazing, green grass feeding, dry fodder feeding

Months of grazing			Green grass supplementation to the tethered animal			Feeding dry fodder (Rice straw)		
Time	No.	%	Schedule	No.	%	Schedule	No.	%
Open grazing whole year	78	36.28	1-2 times	62	44.60	1-2 times	83	61.48
Tethering during cropping season and open grazing during non-cropping season	78	36.28	2-3 times	58	41.73	2-3 times	38	28.15
Tethering whole year.	59	27.44	>3 times	19	13.67	>3 times	14	10.37
Unrecorded	–	–	Unrecorded	76	–	Unrecorded	80	–
Remarks : The local indigenous green grass consumed by pony through grazing includes Tingthou (<i>Cynodon dactylon</i>), Hup (<i>Lersia hexandria</i>) etc.			Remarks : Farmers usually supply 25-45 kg green grass per day per adult animal			Remarks : Farmers usually supply 2 bundles of rice straw per day per animal after being cut and soaked in water.		

Table No. 2 Management : Feeding practices – Rice bran feeding

Rice bran			Feeding combination			Remarks
Method	No.	%	Method	No.	%	
Soaked	119	95.97	With rice straw	109	87.90	Rice bran was not routinely fed .It was sometimes supplemented only during winter months and heavy monsoon days. It was fed 1-2 times daily with a total amount varying from 1-3 kg per day.
Cooked	5	4.03	With green grass	15	12.10	
Raw	–	–	Rice bran alone	–	–	
Unrecorded	91	–	Unrecorded	91	–	

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from this study that the animals of the Manipuri Pony breed were kept by and large on zero input feeding system, depending almost solely on indigenous green grasses grown in the breeding tract and on rice straw produced from the cultivation of paddy. Proper feeding of oilcakes was not reported. In this situation, actual potential of the breed in respect of vigor and performance can't be exploited to the fullest possible. Hence, strategies should be developed to feed them scientifically so as to maintain health and to ensure regular reproduction and thereby for proper sustainability of the breed.

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