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BREEDERS' ASSOCIATION IN PROMOTION OF BUFFALO HUSBANDRY



Buffalo Breeders Association may be one of the innovative approaches for promotion of improved buffalo husbandry practices. Dr. V. B. Dixit, Dr. Hema Tripathi, A. Duhan and Dr. I. J. Singh share their experiences in the functioning of Murrah Buffalo Breeders' Welfare Association (MBBWA).

CONTEXT

India has number of institutions generating and transmitting technologies. We have a number of agencies to deliver technologies. However, at the farmers' level, there is no institution that receives and takes advantage of all these technologies. Therefore, there is a need to create right institution at the farmers' level. The institution may be a commodity-based group of farmers. These are associations where technology is picked up, absorbed and shared. In the recent years, the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, has identified Farmer Producer Organizations (FPO) registered under the special provisions of the companies act, 1956, as the most appropriate institutional forum to mobilize farmers and build their capacity to collectively leverage their production and marketing strength (MoA, 2013). According to Haryana Kisan Ayog's Proceedings (GoH, 2013) on "Opportunity for Youth in Agriculture", normally one person gains a full-time employment by keeping 2-3 milch animals. To further improve income and livelihood opportunities in buffalo husbandry at a rapid pace, the role of producer organization is very significant. The Murrah Buffalo Breeders' Welfare Association was constituted in 2013, keeping the above facts in view.



Office bearers of Association with Director, ICAR-CIRB: Meeting of office bearers of the Association in progress

IMPORTANCE OF BUFFALOES

India has over 111.3 million buffaloes constituting about 57.3 per cent of the world population. Although buffaloes are less in population when compared with the cattle (199.08 million), buffaloes currently produce 62.35 million tonnes of milk contributing to 51.2 per cent of the total milk (FAO, 2012). Besides milk, 1.525 million tonnes of meat is produced from buffaloes. Buffalo draft power also accounts for about 10 per cent of the total draft power contributed by the work animals in the country. In addition to milk, meat and draft, buffaloes also produce 0.52 million tonnes of skin and hides in the country.

In Haryana, buffaloes are the backbone of rural economy. Haryana holds a special place in the field of milk production and it is truly known as the 'Milk Pail' of the country. The state is proud to be the home-tract of one of the best buffalo breeds of the world, i.e., 'Murrah'. Buffalo has also been recognized to be the animal of the 21st Century. Milk production in the state is 54.72 lakh metric tonnes. 80 per cent of the milk is contributed by buffaloes. The per head milk availability in the state is 660 gm per day which is 2nd highest and next to Punjab. Farmers also prefer to buy Murrah semen because Murrah buffaloes are capable of giving 4,000 litres of milk per lactation as against the 2,000-2,200 litres of milk given by a mixed breed buffaloes.



The state has a vast potential of self-employment generation in the sector of Animal Husbandry and Dairying as the farmers can gain full-time employment through this enterprise. Thus, buffalo husbandry plays a great role in the livelihood security of the farmers particularly the small holders who maintain 2-3 buffaloes in the mixed farming system. This sector can be more profitable if improved buffalo husbandry practices are disseminated timely not only by the Government institutions but also by involving the other agencies and introducing innovative extension methodologies. Buffalo breeders' welfare association is one of the efforts in this direction.

MURRAH BUFFALO BREEDERS' WELFARE ASSOCIATION

Formation

Central Institute for Research on Buffaloes organizes Buffalo Mela every year on its foundation day. It is one of the most important events in which farmers owning best buffaloes and bulls participate with lot of zeal and fervour as the event has become extremely popular in Haryana. Thus, all those farmers who participate every year possessing best Murrah Buffalo germplasm were identified and were called for a meeting at the premises of ICAR-CIRB.



More than 70 farmers attended the meeting on 21 June 2013 where they were motivated to have an association for their welfare. After the meeting, farmers deliberated amongst themselves and the general body nominated ad-hoc executive committee having President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer for a period of one year. The Association was registered as Murrah Buffalo Breeders' Welfare Association (MBBWA) in January 2014. A Constitution of Association was prepared and the membership fee was decided. The objectives of MBBWA are given in Box 1.

Box 1: Objectives of MBBWA

The basic objective of MBBWA is to make the buffalo husbandry profitable by (a) promotion of the scientific buffalo husbandry practices, (b) dissemination of technologies and (c) rearing the superior and elite buffaloes. The specific objectives of MBBWA are as follows:

- Register, conserve and propagate superior germplasm
- Improve elite germplasm of the farmers
- Improve production performance through progeny testing and data recording
- Create awareness for maintaining superior germplasm by organizing buffalo melas, health and infertility treatment camps.

Expansion

Since January 2014, regular meetings are conducted by the members. Membership campaign has been initiated and buffalo owners are coming forward to become members. The Association has at present 80 life members who are amongst the most progressive farmers in the state.

Members of the association are actively involved in the process of disseminating improved buffalo husbandry practices in the rural areas. Collectivization of producers into producers' organizations has emerged as one of the most effective path ways to address the many challenges of buffalo husbandry.

PERFORMANCE

Since its establishment, the association is working with full zeal. It is encouraging farmers to rear best Murrah germplasm for meeting the increasing milk requirements of masses as well as means of income for buffalo breeders. Member-based associations offer a proven pathway to successfully deal with the range of challenges that confront buffalo owners today. Farmers owning 2 to 3 buffaloes are able to leverage collective strength and bargaining power to access credit, appropriate technologies, reduce costs, tap high value markets and enter into partnerships with private entities. Associations like MBBWA can provide essential goods and services to other buffalo owners besides their members and contribute significantly to poverty alleviation.

Identification, registration and propagation of superior germplasm

The association is engaged in the process of identification of superior buffaloes and bulls. Today it has registered 80 Murrah high yielding buffaloes. The association has initiated tagging of high yielding buffaloes and bulls having Murrah breed characters.

The India Today magazine recently published a feature on buffaloes where it mentioned about the high yielding Murrah buffaloes which are redefining farm economics of Haryana (Jolly, 2015). The report also mentioned about some of the prominent members of the Association like Sh. Karamvir of Sunaria village who owns Yuvraj, the champion Murrah Bull. He earns between 40-60 lakhs every year by selling Yuvraj's semen. Frozen semen of this bull costs Rs. 500 per straw.

Yuvraj was crowned overall champion in the All India Cattle show in Meerut in October 2014. According to Sh. Karamvir during the buffalo reproductive season i.e. July to March, the queue at his door is very long particularly of those who are the members of the Association. Members of MBBWA and other farmers approach him for buying the semen straws of Yuvraj. Thus, through this association farmer-to-farmer extension is being promoted as they have regular interactions about best buffaloes and bulls of the state.



Sh. Karamvir with his bull Yuvraj



View of Buffalo Mela organised by Murrah Buffalo Breeders' Welfare Association at ICAR-CIRB

Sh. Narinder Singh who is also the treasurer of this association mentions about his bull 'Golu' as original champion responsible for high quality progeny. Golu's offsprings have spread far and wide with scores of high milk yielding buffaloes and several young bulls in other states. As a result of these frequent interactions among the members of the association, they come to know about each and every high yielding buffalo and superior bull present in the state. Members of the association are always in search of semen of superior quality bulls for their high yielding buffaloes. Due to high awareness about the role of bulls in breed improvement, they even demand the semen of a particular champion bull. Thus the association is playing a vital role in the conservation and propagation of superior germplasm.

The association was formed under the guidance and supervision of ICAR-Central Institute for Research on Buffaloes (CIRB). Efforts are being made by the scientists of CIRB to impress upon all the members and other progressive farmers to initiate recording different types of data with respect to reproduction management, health and feeding etc. This process helps in the promotion of buffalo husbandry and leads to income and employment generation.

Dissemination of technologies and Promotion of Buffalo Husbandry

The association is playing a wonderful role in dissemination of improved technologies and promotion of buffalo husbandry in the state of Haryana. ICAR-CIRB support MBBWA members through felicitations, calling for interactive meets and other programs that also recognize their contributions. To fasten the process of transfer of technology with respect to improved buffalo husbandry, the association members have been requested to further form different types of groups for dissemination of technologies pertaining to balanced nutrition, mineral mixture etc. apart from the breeding practices. Though the association is relatively new and small, it is horizontally structured and has wide lines of communication. It is responding to the needs of buffalo owners flexibly and rapidly in their vicinity by sharing their concern with them and maintaining their presence in even in remote locations.

CONSTRAINTS

Financing: The association is working by using its own funds i.e., contributions made by its own members. A major extension activity, i.e., buffalo mela, was organized by them by contributing money for the event. They sponsored prizes for winners of the competition in different categories. However, the association is being motivated to explore different funding sources like CAPART, NABARD and other Government agencies. However, the members are not aware about different schemes/programmes of the Government. They have less interaction with some of the rural development agencies like NABARD and CAPART which promote group approach. Thus they need to be sensitized regularly on these issues.

Capacity Development: Organisations like MMBWA face problems of dominance by some of the members. Some of the members are interested only in winning prizes at Melas and to increase the cost of their buffaloes for sale. Sometimes members have difference of opinions on some issues. This has been affecting motivation for joint action which needs to be developed through capacity-building. They need hand-holding so as to emerge as a genuine democratic association.

Physical infrastructure: The association needs to have its own office. Office bearers and members conduct meetings either in CIRB or in the houses of individual farmers.

CONCLUSION

Murrah Buffalo Breeders' Welfare Association is an innovative model of organizing, strengthening and facilitating user groups to strengthen extension and development of a sector. Such groups are also extremely useful to provide systematic feedback to researchers regarding refinement of the existing technologies and also the type of specific technological support they need. Research organizations may consider facilitating formation of such associations and strengthening their capacities in the respective sectors.

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