

BUFFALO CHAMPIONSHIPS AS MOTIVATORS FOR BUFFALO-REARING FARMERS



Considering the importance of buffaloes in Indian agriculture there is an increasing interest in organising buffalo championships in the country. However the quality and effectiveness of these events could be further enhanced argue Drs Sajjan Singh, Hema Tripathi, VB Dixit and BN Tripathi.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture fairs are gaining popularity by the day. Quite often there’s more emphasis on crops, horticulture and agro-machinery than on livestock. Currently, there is a growing interest among farmers in diversity of livestock as they provide a steady income to these farmers, even when there is crop failure. Even otherwise animals play an important role in the life of rural communities in India as they are a part of many of their rituals, and are worshiped as well. India hosts some of the largest cattle and livestock fairs in the world, some of these are: the largest cattle fair in India is Bihar’s Sonapur Cattle Fair (also known as *Harihar Kshetra Mela*), Nagaur Cattle Fair, Jhalawar Cattle Fair, Pushkar Cattle Fair, Pushkar Camel Fair, Kolayat Cattle Fair, Bateswar Cattle Fair and Gangapur Cattle Fair. Most of these fairs are organised for the purpose of trading animals, including buffaloes, with no emphasis on competitions.

Now livestock shows/championships are being organized annually by the Punjab Government wherein best buffaloes from all over the country participate. In 2017, the Departments of Animal Husbandry, Fisheries & Dairy Development of Punjab State, along with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) organized the 10th Agri. & Livestock Expo on December 1-5, at Patiala, Punjab, which turned out to be one of the biggest agriculture and livestock events in the country. This trade fair brought together all the stakeholders of this industry—government (both Central & State), policy makers, industry, research organizations, academicians, farmers, agronomists, NGOs, and Indian and foreign companies associated with the agriculture & livestock sectors – on a single platform to explore business opportunities.

BUFFALO CHAMPIONSHIP

Over the last few years, there has been an increase in the number of cattle shows and championships in India. The prime reasons for organizing these events include: setting new records of milking, identifying best germplasm, and also to serve as a platform for livestock owners to share their problems and discuss potential solutions. During such events farmers also benefit by getting access to new information, along with literature regarding these, from national and international agencies/ companies/ cooperatives/ state departments who also have stalls at these venues.



Considering the importance of buffaloes in Indian agriculture and its contributions to the Indian economy (Box 1), there is an increasing interest in organising buffalo championships in the country. Glittering black beauties attracting crowds in and around judging pavilions is a common sight in almost all the livestock championships. In the recent past we have seen a succession of championships. The competitions are organized across different categories and species of livestock. While some of the livestock species do not attract farmers in large numbers, buffaloes are emerging as the main crowd puller – both inside and outside the ring. Buffalo exhibitions are also being organized by governments and some of the institutes demonstrate and showcase quality buffaloes to which farmers are attracted in large numbers. Livestock farmers, especially progressive ones, participate in these exhibitions in order to learn the latest technologies developed by research institutes.

Box 1: Buffaloes and the Indian Economy

Buffaloes are heralded as key contributors to ensuring nutritional security and employment to the rural masses. Asia hosts 97.04% of the total buffalo population across continents. India's contribution to this is 57.8%. India contributes 67.75% of the world's buffalo milk and more than 60% of the buffalo meat, although it is only 36% of the total bovine population. Statistics has revealed the significant role buffaloes play in the Indian economy. At present, buffalo products earn the highest foreign exchange and are the single largest agricultural commodity to generate this sort of revenue for India. The 19th Livestock Census noted that, while the total livestock population (512.05 million in 2012) decreased by about 3.3% over the previous census (18th Livestock Census 2007), the buffalo population recorded growth from – 105.3 million to 108.7 million i.e., about 3.19% (DAHD&F 2010). The female buffalo population is increased by 7.99% over the previous census. The major reason may be that the buffalo is a triple purpose animal, being suitable for milk, meat and as draught animals. It can efficiently utilize poor quality roughage and crop residue into high quality animal produce such as milk and lean meat. Buffalo milk is suitable for a wide range of dairy products including butter, milk powder, mozzarella cheese, khova, curd, yoghurt, shrikhand, dried ice cream mix, dairy whitener, etc., and is the most-liked milk among the masses.

The diversity of buffaloes in India is noteworthy and they are spread over almost all parts of the country with varying population density. India has the world's best buffalo breeds that are noted for their distinct superiority, adaptability to withstand heat, resistance to many tropical diseases, and ability to thrive even under harsh climatic conditions. Buffaloes are the new cash crop for farmers and can be used to double the incomes of their owners. High-milk-yielding buffaloes are redefining farm economics from Punjab, Bihar, and West Bengal to even the south. But it is Haryana that is at the epicentre of this success – for a growing number of farmers in Haryana the real icing on the cake is in raising champion breeding bulls. More than 70% of the milch breeds of buffalo are concentrated in the northern and western states, including Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra, but the population status of 13 recognized breeds varies within the country. In fact these animals are considered an asset financially as they serve as an instrument of insurance against the risk of crop failure due to natural calamities.

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

The Punjab and Haryana governments have been organising National Championships on a regular basis. A few other states have also started following this trend.

Competitions for Adult Bulls

Buffaloes are categorized mainly in to two groups of males and females. Each group is further subdivided into 3-4 categories as per the convenience of organizers. In all, 6-8 competitions, excluding the overall championship of the event, are held. The most attractive show is the congregation of overweight, oversized (specific to breed), overfed and cosmetically prepared and decorated adult bulls, especially groomed for the livestock championships. The major challenge is that farmers are unaware of the genetic merits of these bulls as they are ranked by the judges in the melas on the basis of their phenotypic characters, and the owners exploit this situation by selling their semen at premium prices to innocent farmers who later on feel cheated due to poor performance of the bulls. Only pedigree-verified bulls with recorded mothers are allowed to participate in the championships and semen from these can be disseminated to the farmers.



Beauty Competitions

The second category is female buffaloes, where the highest milk-yielding buffalo is identified. A sizable number of buffaloes are recorded that yield above 20 litres of milk per day. In this competition, participation is restricted to recorded and registered animals. This event hardly invites controversies, and it encourages farmers to rear quality buffaloes. Competition in other categories is very tough, especially in calf rallies. In these types of competitions only those calves participate who are progenies of tested bulls that have already been used in the field-progeny testing program. Retention or holding of milk for beauty competition is not in the welfare of animals, so it is suggested that routinely milked animals only be selected for competition.



Murrah buffalo walks the ramp at the first of its kind function – "Murrah on the Ramp"

State Championships

State governments also have many programs wherein huge prize money is distributed to encourage the farmers to adopt dairy farming as an enterprise. Many state governments are also organizing calf rallies and milk yield competitions; and give handsome amounts of money to the prize-winning animals. Very recently one mega livestock show was held at Jhajjar during the Golden Jubilee year of Haryana wherein highly lauded animals from all over Haryana and adjoining states participated, and buffaloes were the main attraction of the livestock show. Crores of rupees were spent in organizing



this mega event and prizes worth lakhs of rupees were distributed among the breed champion buffaloes as well as to those with the highest milk production records. The state government is also recording the buffaloes at village level by constituting a team of experts. The incentive money is distributed to the owners of recorded animals. The minimum production level from 18 litres of milk upwards is considered for incentive money. This scheme has prompted the farmers to rear quality Murrah buffaloes in the state. This has also improved the quality of germplasm in the state.

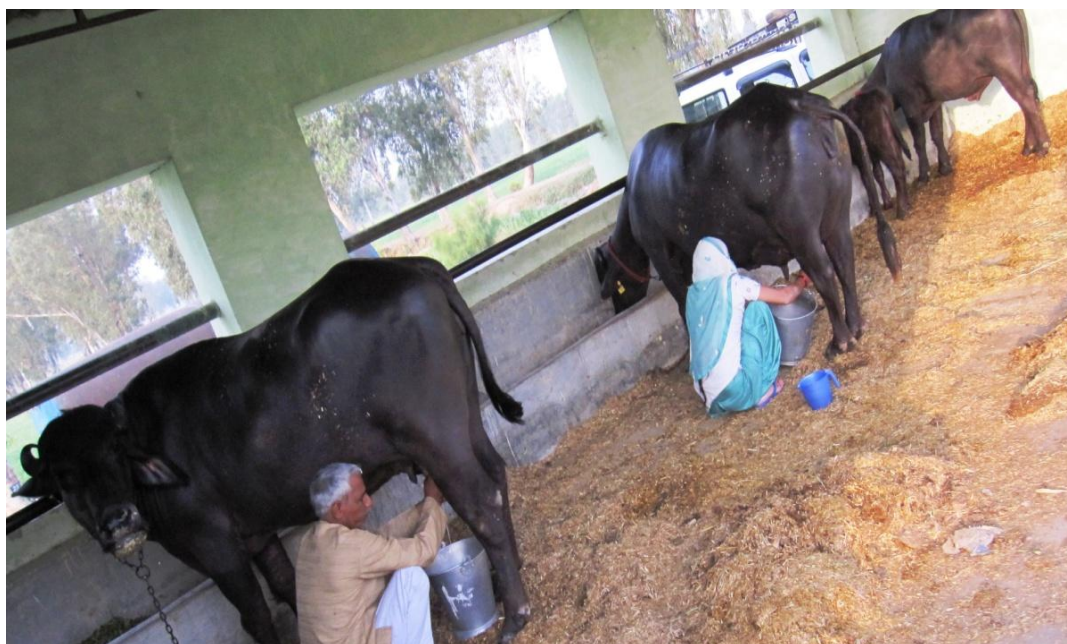
Buffalo Competitions Organized By Breeders Associations

Organising *melas* and buffalo championships by breeders' associations is a regular activity and a cost-effective affair because it is arranged on a participatory mode by each participating farmer with no involvement of government machinery. This gives a message to buffalo-owning farmers to rear quality buffaloes, and helps in spreading the message of maintaining superior germplasm. These associations are helpful in registering, conserving, and propagating superior germplasm.



Milk Recordings: An Opportunity to Fetch High Prices for Buffaloes

The state animal husbandry department is making efforts to identify high-yielding Murrah buffaloes at the village level through regular milk recordings carried out at farmers' doorsteps. Murrah buffaloes meeting the benchmark of 18 kg peak yield or 3600kg lactation yields are properly identified (with ear tags) along with their progeny. Cash incentives and certificates issued by organisations enable farmers to get very high prices for their animals. These certified animals also participate in national and state level buffalo championships from time to time, and earn huge prices in cash for their owners. This activity tremendously enhances the price of recorded buffaloes as they are tagged as high yielders during such events. Thus this activity encourages the farmers to rear high-yielding animals.



Calf Rallies- An Opportunity for Farmers to Teach and Learn

Conducting calf rallies provide physical inspection and verification of the calves produced by the field units through Artificial Insemination. It is a great opportunity for livestock owners to learn more about progeny testing, health care, and management practices to get better returns from animal rearing. It not only brings livestock owners from different places onto a single platform and showcases their calves, but also acts as a meeting place for them to see the improved management techniques adopted by other livestock owners. They can also learn how to practically follow innovative feeding methods that can improve the health of their calves as well as how their healthy calves to other farmers. Calf rallies provide an opportunity to get extension advisory services from the scientific personnel at the venue on latest technologies and improved animal husbandry practices, and facilitate farmer-to-farmer extension. Awards and incentives to the calf owners as a token of their participation motivate them to maintain healthy calves so as to get maximum benefits in future. ICAR-CIRB and Haryana Livestock Development Board (HLDB) are a few examples of agencies who implement the progeny-testing program on Murrah buffaloes. They organise calf rallies along with several other extension activities to increase the active participation of farmers.



WAY FORWARD TO IMPROVE BUFFALO SHOWS AND CHAMPIONSHIPS

- The frequency of block and state-level animal shows need to be increased in order to promote quality animals. These livestock shows motivate farmers to rear high-yielding buffaloes, which in turn will increase their income and enrich the state with valuable germplasm. Organizing these competitions is cost effective because government agencies are already entrusted with the task of organizing these. But they need to increase the frequency of milk recordings and identification of male calves. These animals may be put up for show at village and block level so as to be selected for participation in state and national championships. Competitions may then be held at district and state levels. At state levels, only winners of competitions held at district level may be allowed to participate.
- Judging should be based on set procedures and standards under each category to avoid acrimonious situations during these shows.
- The criteria with weightage should be decided in advance, and made public before the mela. The standard score card for buffalo shows should be followed strictly and animals should be scored accordingly – this makes the judging more objective.
- Ensure proper logistics for owners reaching from distant places with their animals, and arrangements must also be made for fodder and drink for animals.
- Organize buffalo shows and competitions with proper linkages with state departments, veterinary universities, NGOs, associations at regional level for best utilization of resources and efforts.
- During the event technical sessions/interactive sessions may be arranged for intensive discussions.
- Proper arrangements must be made for quarantine to prevent the risk of spreading disease because farmers from across the country bring their cattle, goats, pigs, sheep and other animals to participate, and the status of their health is not known.
- The model followed by Punjab Government for organizing Livestock Shows and Championships for all animal species should also be adopted and replicated by other states, for uplifting the financial status of their farmers.

Although there are certain challenges and threats in organizing buffalo shows and championships but the strengths/benefits outweigh weaknesses. On the whole farmers are greatly motivated and gain much from these events.



References

DAHD&F (2010.) Report of 18th Livestock Census 2007, Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying & Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, New Delhi.

Dhanda OP (2004.) Developments in water buffalo in Asia and Oceania. Proceedings of the 7th World Buffalo Congress, pp. 17-28. Manila, Philippines, October 20-23.

<http://www.walkthroughindia.com/attraction/7-biggest-and-largest-cattle-fairs-of-india/>

Dr Sajjan Singh, Principal Scientist, ICAR-Central Institute for Research on Buffaloes, Hisar (sajjansingh@mail.com)

Dr Hema Tripathi, Principal Scientist, ICAR-Central Institute for Research on Buffaloes, Hisar (hematripathi1@gmail.com)

Dr Vishwa Bharti Dixit, Principal Scientist, ICAR-Central Institute for Research on Buffaloes, Hisar (ybdixit@mail.com)

Dr BN Tripathi, Director, ICAR-National Research Centre on Equines, Hisar (bntripathi1@yahoo.co.in)

**AESA Secretariat: Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP),
Road No 10, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India
www.aesa-gfras.net Email: aesanetwork@gmail.com**