

OPENING ADDRESS

His Excellency the Vice Minister for Agriculture Belay Ejigu

Invited guests, workshop participants, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and honor to welcome you to this workshop entitled “The Opportunities and Challenges of Enhancing Goat Production in East Africa”. I would also like to extend a special word of welcome to those of you who came from outside Ethiopia. I hope you had a good trip from your places of work and residence to this workshop.

Workshop participants, ladies and gentlemen,

As you have already realized, Ethiopia is naturally endowed with immense agricultural potential and is home to vast livestock genetic resources. The livestock sub-sector of the economy, supporting the livelihood of the rural population contributes 30% of the agricultural GDP and 12% of the total GDP without including the value of draught power. Almost all crop production in the country, covering a land area of about 10 million hectares, is highly dependent on animal power.

Hence, livestock play a vital role in the Ethiopian economy, as a source of traction power, food, fuel and manure. However, the livestock sub-sector provides the lowest per capita products and plays a less significant role in the national economy as compared with crop agriculture. To overcome some of the problems related to the sub-sector, the Ministry of Agriculture of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, with funding from the African Development Bank, has been able to launch the National Livestock Development Project (NDLP), which focuses on breed improvement, animal health, forage development and training. Furthermore, the Ministry of Agriculture has formulated a Ruminant Livestock Strategy under the National Livestock Program. Livestock packages have also been developed and launched in most regions of the country.

Conference participants, ladies and gentlemen,

With regard to ruminants it is believed that they are considered to be adapted to the limited grazing resources upon which they subsist. Ruminants play a major role in the utilization of slack farm resources, particularly land not suitable for cropping, crop by-products such as straw and weeds as well as family labor not employed gainfully elsewhere. Goats, which are members of the ruminant family, can be considered a highly controversial animal species and are expected to be the center of attention during this workshop. The controversy around goats partly emanates from a lack of research data on goats and a lack of appreciation of the role these animals play at critical times such as in drought periods. History witnesses that goats guarantee human existence during bad times and in the subsistence mode of production. It is also believed that goats have served man from the birth of history. They have survived and bred in genetic isolation and the potential productivity of many of the populations remains to be explored.

In comparison with other domestic animals, goats are often the victims of prejudice and neglect, but they have nevertheless fulfilled a most useful task in supplying a part of the human population with milk, meat, hair, leather and other products. Besides, goats persist in areas where animal husbandry has been neglected, where conditions of under nutrition and malnutrition prevail and where poor management may encourage the presence of diseases and parasitic conditions

inimical to larger forms of livestock. Where feed is scarce and of low nutritive value, the larger animals are at a disadvantage because of their greater maintenance requirements. On the contrary, small animals like goats with correspondingly lower maintenance needs are often able to cover sufficient ground to collect their daily nutritive requirements from herbage and may even be able to secure a surplus of nutrients for milk or meat production. Goats possess great adaptability and have such relatively low nutrient requirements that they adjust to a wide range of environmental conditions and are particularly useful in poor areas where sheep and cows cannot collect enough feed to maintain themselves. It is true that irrational management of any livestock species will cause environmental degradation. But we will do injustice if we blame goats for all our mistakes.

Workshop participants, ladies and gentlemen,

This workshop is unique in that the collaborating partners i.e. the Awassa College of Agriculture and the E (Kika) de la Garza Institute for Goat Research of Langston University, USA are not only aiming at strengthening the research component but also the extension aspect of goat production. Extension is usually left out in several collaborating projects but it is high time to realize that we need to collaborate on this aspect.

We are glad to know that these two educational institutions have dared to move out of their academic world and engage themselves in research and development aspects under the farmers' conditions. The focus of the project is women in livestock production and in particular that of small animals such as small ruminants and chickens. Goats can conveniently be cared for by women and children, occupy little housing space, and supply both meat and milk in quantities suitable for immediate family consumption.

Workshop participants, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Awassa College of Agriculture, the E (Kika) de la Garza Institute for Goat Research of Langston University and the Association Liaison Office for University Cooperation in Development, Washington DC for organizing this workshop. I am also thankful to all of you for participating in this workshop.

Finally, wishing you a fruitful exchange of information, I now declare that the workshop is officially open. Thank you for your attention.