

ASSESSMENT OF RUMINANT WELFARE AND ETHICAL PRACTICES AMONG LIVESTOCK FARMERS IN FARM SETTLEMENTS, OYO STATE, NIGERIA

¹*Komolafe, P.L., ²Olawale, O.T. and ²Babayemi, O.J.

¹Department of Agricultural Science and Technology, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria)

²Department of Animal Science, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

*Corresponding author: komolafe.priscilla@bouesti.edu.ng; +2348036106690

ABSTRACT

Welfare and ethical animal management practices is a neglected aspect of animal care in Nigeria. Despite the new development in animal welfare in Nigeria, Awareness and adoption of ethical practice among cattle farmers in the study area is limited. Therefore, this study was designed to examine the attitudes of animal handlers towards ethics and animal welfare in Government farm settlements in Ibadan Nigeria. Structured oral interview was conducted on the animal handlers, using a total number of ninety-six respondents consulted in two selected farm settlements of Oyo state. Respondents were examined on their attitudes toward animal practices, questions asked covers staffing, system of management, record keeping, freedom of movement, building and accommodation, feeding and animal health management. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics SPSS 20. The study revealed that 90.7% of the respondent reported having separate accommodation for sick animals and 81.3% agreed to cleaning of feeding equipment daily. Majority (73.3%) of the respondents made water readily available for their animals. Most (85.7%) of farmers reported that sick animals should be separated from the healthy ones, 90.5% said housing the same species is not appropriate in a particular space., Most farmers (90.5%) gave supplemented feed to their animal while about 67% reported shelter is appropriate for animals and most were kept under tree. Stream was the main source of water (81%) that was available at the farm settlement and the frequency of water served is weekly (71.4%). In conclusion, farmers at the government farm settlements agreed that animals must be ethically managed.

Keywords: Animal Ethics, Animal welfare, Livestock farmers, Farm settlement

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, ethical issues pertaining to farm animals and pets are rarely discussed in scientific meetings, seminars, workshops and local associations of professional and non-professional animal handlers, indicating that the awareness of animal ethics is low Babayemi and Bamikole (2010). Thus, many of the natural laws guiding ethical farm animal management are often disobeyed and neglected by animal handlers due to the high level of ignorance on the basic ethical treatments expected to be given to the animals, thus subjecting the animals to several kinds of untold pain, suffering, hardship and discomfort Babayemi and Bamikole (2010). Research has shown that livestock handlers' attitudes towards animal welfare are influenced by various factors, including: cultural and social norms, education and training and personal characteristics. Hemsworth, 2003 reported that animal welfare handlers who receives education and training likely to have positive attitudes towards animal welfare also, Rollin, 2004 stated that Handlers' attitudes are often shaped by cultural and social norms, which can either promote or compromise animal welfare. Handlers' personal characteristics, such as empathy and personality traits, can influence their attitudes towards animal welfare (Waiblinger *et al.*, 2006). Government farm settlement is a good organization for animal production that seems to be often overlooked by the populace. It is meant to serve as role model for other livestock farmers as a higher degree of conformity is expected in terms of ethical practices and other standard management practices being a governmental establishment. Government farm settlements are expected to serve as role model to other livestock farmers as a high degree of conformity is expected in terms of ethical management practices. There are no baseline data on the handling pattern of livestock handler in Nigeria. Therefore, this necessitated the need to assess the ethical and welfare practices as well as the attitude of the livestock farmers in the study area.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research was carried out in the farm settlements of Oyo state, comprising of Akufo farm settlement, Ido Local Government Area and Lalupon farm settlement, Lagelu Local Government. **The** assessment of ethical farm animal management practices among livestock farmers in the above study areas was

carried out using extensive field questionnaire and structural oral interview. A total number of ninety-six (96) respondents were given questionnaire. Fifty-seven (57) respondents from Akufo farm settlement and thirty-nine (39) respondents from Lalupon farm settlement were used. 76 for poultry and 21 for Ruminant farmers. The questionnaire covered the areas of: Freedom of movement: of animals, building and accommodation, health status, treatment of sick animals, handling measures and attitude of farmers towards ethical practice feeding systems. Data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics SPSS 20.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Presented in Table 1 is the assessment of ethical management practices among livestock farmers in the study area. The result showed that all farmers reported they allowed their animals move freely and not restrained. Physical restraint can cause discomfort, pain, and injury to animals, particularly if equipment is poorly designed or used incorrectly (Gregory, 2007).

Table 1: Assessment of Ruminant farmers handling practices at Farm settlements in Oyo

Categories	Response	Frequency	%
Freedom of movement for animals	Yes	21	100.0
Building and accommodation			
Separate accommodation/pen for sick animals	Yes	18	85.7
	No	3	14.3
	Total	21	100.0
Housing different species of animals together	Yes	2	9.5
	No	19	90.5
	Total	21	100.0
Feeding			
Giving feeds supplements to Animals	Yes	19	90.5
	No	2	9.5
	Total	21	100.0
Frequency of cleaning of feeding Equipment	Daily	19	90.5
	Occasionally	2	9.5
	Total	21	100.0
Source of water given to animals	Well	4	19.0
	Stream	17	81.0
	Total	21	100.0
Time of serving water to animals	Weekly	15	71.4
	Occasionally	4	19.0
	Readily available	2	9.5
Having animals not kept inside Buildings	Yes	14	66.7
	No	7	33.3
	Total	21	100.0
Type of shelter provided for animals not kept inside buildings	Tree shed	17	81.0
	Fenced area	2	9.5
	No response	2	9.5
	Total	21	100.0

Hemsworth, 2003 reported that animals with more anxious or fearful temperaments may be more stressed by restraint. Most (85.7%) of farmers are with the opinion that sick animals should be separated this could be a means to avoid spread of diseases to other animals and also to be properly cared for. AVMA (2020) emphasizes the importance of providing proper care and housing for animals, including separating sick animals and different species. Also 90.5% said housing different species is not appropriate in a particular space. Aside animal grazing, most farmers (90.5%) additionally give supplemented feed to their animal. With regard to cleaning, 9.5% reported occasional cleaning of feeding equipment since they are not used always. This might be because many of the animals are being grazed. About 67% had shelter for their animals and most were kept under tree. ASPCA (2020)

recommends separating different species in animal shelters to prevent stress, injury, and disease transmission. Stream was the main source of water (81%) that was available at the farm settlement and the frequency of water served is weekly (71.4%). Unavailability of water *ad-libitum* might be that animals are led to the stream to drink while they go grazing. In addition, 14 (66.7%) reported having animals not kept inside a building, while others (33.3%) did not have. In addition, 81% had tree sheds and 2 (9.5%) had fenced area for their animals which is mostly done in the evening to avoid them wondering away.

Presented in Table 2 is the attitude of farmers to ethical practices at Government settlement in Oyo State. The study revealed that, most (76.2%) of the farmer strongly agreed that care must be taken when handling animals because they also have life in them. Bekoff (2002) quoted that we must treat animals with respect, care, and compassion, recognizing that they have the capacity to experience joy, fear, anger, and other emotions. Most (61.9%) Agreed that staff experience affect animal handling, and thus experience staff should be allowed to always handle animals. Respondents (61.9%) agreed that adult staff are preferable to young one in animal care. Also, almost all of them (85.7%) disagreed that animal inspection may not be one daily and 33.3% strongly agreed and 52.4% agreed that inspection of farm animals has been helpful in production. NAHLN, 2020 recommends that Inspect livestock at least twice daily, with more frequent inspections during periods of stress or when animals are at higher risk of disease.

Table 2: Response of Farmers on Attitude to Ethical Practices (percentage)

	SA	Agree	U	S	SD	Total
Care must be taken when handling animals because they have life	76.2	19.0	4.8			
Staff experience affect animal handling,	33.3	61.9	4.8			
Adult staff are preferable to young one in animal care	33.3	61.9	4.8			
Animal inspection may not be done daily		4.8	4.8	85.7		
Movement of animals should be at their own pace	19.0	71.4	4.8			
Sick and distressed animals must be treated urgently and separated in good accommodation	19.0	76.2	9.5			
Young and adult animals should be housed together		9.5	4.8	81.0		
Provision of heat source for animals during cold weather is essential	61.9	33.3				
Animals should be fed more than once daily	61.9	28.6	4.8			
Animal pens should be cleaned daily	61.9	28.6	4.8			
Animals should be served water only when thirsty		9.5	9.5	76.2		
Animals should be kept away from rain	38.1	52.4	9.5			
Animals should be free from pain and discomfort	33.3	61.9	4.8			
Diseased animals can be slaughtered or sold			3	18		

*SA-Strongly agreed *A- Agreed *SD D Disagreed *Strongly disagreed U- Undecided

In addition, almost all of them supported the opinion that record keeping is a quality of good management and should be one by animal handlers and that herd health record is important. Lastly, 90.5%, this is the majority, disagreed that movement of animals should not be monitored. Animals should be kept away from rain 38.1%, Animals should be free from pain and discomfort agreed (61.9%), most agreed that animal should be fed more than once daily and should be kept from rain. Their attitude could be suggestive of appropriate animal welfare towards a positive life. With regard to daily inspection of animal, all farmers did daily inspection, Most farmers that have residence within the farm settlement claim to inspect their animals as often as possible while others that reside outside the settlement report that they inspect only when they come around to feed the animals, this can be said to be ethical enough as it is in accordance with The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2000 which states that All animals kept in husbandry systems in which their welfare depends on frequent human attention shall be thoroughly inspected at least once a day to check that they are in a state of well-being. All farmers reported such daily routine inspection has been helpful. Some said it helps to detect early signs of disease, some said inspection has helped them to monitor feed consumption and efficiency.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, freedom of movement, feeding and animal health management. It was concluded that handlers of these animals were much aware of the ethical practices to ensure welfare of farm animals.

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