

Setting up cow manufacturing factory and ensuring long life of cows in India; Are we really prepared ?

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Last fortnight dairy industry was very much in media limelight due to the launch of two large schemes on setting up cow manufacturing factory through sexed semen for female calves and a cow health program for eradication of FMD and Brucellosis in Indian livestock.

One of them was launched by our newly elected Dairy Minister Sh Giri Raj Singh on Sep 1 and the second one was from our Prime minister Modi ji with Chief minister of UP Sh Yogi ji on Sep 11th, 2019.

We will come to these schemes later. Cow milk prices were raised in Delhi and NCR by Rs 2/liter by Mother Dairy, Amul plans to launch smaller SKUs for rural markets, Haryana waiving off outstanding Rs 1268 Crore milk cess for the benefit of farmers, Milklane venturing into cattle feed, MP government to sell Cow milk with Kadaknath Meat, and Prabhat shares looking north on getting delisted were a couple of other significant news releases from the Indian dairy industry.

Now let us review the news related to Setting up only female calf of desi cows factory in India by using imported /domestic sexed semen. Our honorable minister stated that in Vidarbha he would be bringing 3 million doses and by 2025 over 10 million such doses of sexed semen would be inseminated in the cows at the national level. On the basis of this sexed semen, there would only be females taking birth and mob lynching problems of male calves or heifers would be eradicated. He also says that healthy low producing cows of the country will be utilized to act as surrogate mother for 20liter yielding embryos(it was however not clear whether those embryos would be of desi cows or exotic but we presume it to be of desi cows only). This way he also mentioned that the value addition in milk products would increase to 40-50% from current levels of 20-25% due to the very low cost of production in milk. You may click at the video news link given in dairy pulse to get full details.

We believe that the agriculture ministry must have done all backend calculations for making the above deliberations a reality in the future. However, I beg to differ and would like to share some more facts for a better understanding of this sexed semen mathematics.

- a. Sexed semen is not a 100 % guaranteed female calf producing technology and the best could be considered at around 87-90% which means in 100 doses we will still be getting 10-13 male calves.
- b. Sexed semen has a lower success rate as compared to normal semen which gets reflected more in case of AI success rate. Still considering a national average of around 30 % AI success rate even with sexed semen the final outcome would be close to 26 female calves and 4 male calves per 100 doses of sexed semen. So on 10 million doses, we will be getting around 26 lakhs female calves and 4 lakhs male calves (sufficient for becoming a stray animal).
- c. The success rate of sexed semen is more in heifers than cows in subsequent lactations, thus it would be done through selective breeding only.

Now in our country where the majority of AI business is done by quacks with very poor cold chain for frozen semen and limited semen testing facilities, how could one ensure the skill level of AI worker to identify and select the right animal for breeding with sexed semen? If the same responsibility will be given to government vet then they are already over occupied because of lack of staff and facilities. Lastly, the stray animals' problem is not limited to male heifers but also with unproductive, old and sick female cows also. **It would be good if skilled sexed semen AI workers with knowledge of selective breeding are prepared before even planning such initiatives.**

Let us look at the second large scheme which is talking about a comprehensive program for eradicating Foot and mouth and brucellosis from India in next 5-7 years. For this Vaccines worth Rs 13500 crores will be used on around 50 crore bovine animals including cows, buffaloes, goats and sheeps.

Currently out of 30 crores cows and buffaloes, we have only one third i.e around 10 crores which are in milk and could reproduce regularly. A large percentage of them are suffering from Brucellosis. We have only 20 % of these animals identified and registered under Aadhar so we do not know the exact number of animals infected with Brucellosis. FMD vaccine which was earlier being used at a half-yearly vaccination protocol is now recommended under thrice a year vaccination protocol. Which means firstly we will be vaccinating 20 crore more animals than 10 crores which are productive and that too with 50 % more dosage of FMD vaccine as the earlier vaccine is no more effective after 4 months.

It is not a matter of debate but a matter of thinking deep and acknowledging the problem of unproductive animals and finding a suitable way to control their population. I would have loved a scheme of sterilization of all unidentifiable male heifers in the country at any cost so that they are not able to reproduce more non descript and low productive animals like them. This may be done first till the government is in a position to decide on policies related to scientific management of these stray animals.

Stray animals except for reducing plastic waste in urban and suburban areas are not of any other use. They are responsible for increasing road accidents, the risk to the public at large on highways, in markets and residential areas.

They are even a great threat to farmer's income as the farmer has to wake up whole night to safeguard his farms from such animals.

We have full faith in the system and this being such a sensitive issue that no one from the industry would like to talk about it.

We have full faith in the wisdom of the government and the leadership. We can simply request the policymaker to make a task force to find an appropriate solution before it is too late.

Believe me, we have almost reached a tipping point in this case and each day delay might cost too much for the dairy industry.

Some likeminded dairymen may echo my voice per return mail.

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