Transition from Sustainable Communal Farming to Commercial Production in Botswana: The Role of Ranch Type

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Abstract

The degradation of communal rangelands and the subsequent negative impact on the livestock productivity is a major cause of concern in Botswana (Balopi, 1996:6-7). Evidence indicates that the livestock industry in communal areas is experiencing a continuous decline in terms of low calving percentage, off-take rates, sales and a high mortality (Kwelagobe, 1996). Findings from the survey conducted among a random sample of 132 stock farmers on different types of ranches in the southern Region of Botswana revealed that the majority of respondents have no knowledge of their calving percentage and also that no significant differences occur between the respondents on the ranches that were compared, namely the individual, the syndicate the community and the communal ranches. Individual and community ranches have a slightly higher off-take than the group or communal ranches, but the differences are small. It appears that most of the respondents do manage their animals from a distance, in that they seldom stay on the ranches, but somewhere else. All ranches are over-stocked and it appears that the practice of stock reduction is not reconcilable with respondents’ needs, goals and perceived means of achieving them. In spite of insignificant differences in management and production efficiency between the different types of ranches, there is a very clear preference gradient from the individual ranch, followed by the group or syndicate ranch, to the least acceptable community and communal ranches. From these findings, authorities as well as livestock farmers need to be made aware that, fencing or changing the communal ranch into a community, group or individual ranch does not necessarily contribute to improved livestock production or conservation of natural resources. For extension to be successful, more appropriate solutions will have to be found or a better insight be gained into the motives and needs behind the keeping of livestock, so that more appropriate messages can be formulated and ultimately a more commercial orientation or a resource sensitive attitude be promoted.