DBT-NIAB takes up project to help upscale goat production

New Delhi, Jan 12 (India Science Wire): Goat husbandry in India is essentially an endeavor of millions of small holders who rear animals on crop-residues and common property resources. Goats play a significant role in providing supplementary income and livelihood to millions of resource-poor farmers and landless workers in rural India. The Department of Biotechnology’s Hyderabad-based National Institute of Animal Biotechnology (DBT-NIAB) has taken up a project to upscale subsistence-level goat production to a viable, profitable model that will increase incomes and thereby reduce poverty and enhance food security, while simultaneously preserving the community and national resource systems.

The project is being implemented in Yadgir district of Karnataka with extramural funding from DBT under NITI Aayog’s aspirational districts programme. Researchers and other personnel from the Institute will demonstrate the various biotechnological interventions that can be used for advanced goat farming in rural areas.

The project envisages setting up of village level self-help groups of small scale goat farmers to introduce technological interventions for better management practices to enhance earning. It will seek to transfer knowledge on economical methods to make feed stocks from locally available dry fodder; promote efficient micronutrient delivery methodologies; and improve roughage digestibility by supplementing cellulase. Besides, it would facilitate the transfer of genes from goat breeds like Black Bengal, which produce an abundance of offspring, and use of male selection procedures for improved breeding practices.

The main target groups of beneficiaries would be women and Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes in arid and semi-arid areas. This would include small-scale agro-pastoralists who cultivate small plots of land, as well as the landless. In both cases, a high degree of dependence on common property resources is a key feature. In addition to goat keepers, the beneficiaries will include other goat value chain actors, including small-scale traders, input and service providers.

Over the years, there has been a slow but steady shift in goat farming practices. Small farmers have been opting for goat rearing in a situation when they are forced by declining returns from agriculture in ecologically fragile areas. Today, goats ensure income to more than five million households in India. It is now bonanza time, with demand for goat meat projected to shoot up. India will have to almost double its goat population in the coming years to meet the projected demands from rising population.

However, land available for grazing has shrunk by half over the past 50 years. There is an urgent need to find and promote alternate feeding practices. Otherwise, goats might turn from an asset to a liability. This new project aims to address these issues by establishing a practical and sustainable goat farming model. (India Science Wire)
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