



Mobile Vet-Units for Livestock

This editorial is based on [“Just What The Doctor Ordered For The Livestock Farmer”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 18/01/2022. It talks about health-related issues of livestock in India.

For Prelims: 20th livestock census, Livestock Health and Disease Control Programme, Mobile Veterinary Units (MVUs), Bovine Mastitis, Rashtriya Gokul Mission, National Livestock Mission, National Artificial Insemination Programme.

For Mains: Significance of livestock for Indian economy, Challenges faced by livestock farmers.

The [Twentieth Livestock Census](#) indicated that India today has a livestock population of approximately 537 million; of this, 95.8% is concentrated in rural areas.

Given the fact that most of the country's livestock is in rural and remote areas, **access to veterinary services is a major challenge**. Livestock farmers are often compelled to travel far from their villages whenever their animals need treatment. This **adversely impacts the longevity and the productivity of their livestock**.

To resolve the problem of access to vet-services, the government introduced the facility of **Mobile Veterinary Units (MVUs)** to provide doorstep services to the farmers.

Along with this significant step, the main focus in the near future shall be on upgradation of vet health-care services, disease surveillance and training (CVE), and disease reporting in real time.

Livestock Health and Related Initiatives

- **About:** [Animal husbandry](#) is an integral component of Indian agriculture, supporting the livelihood of almost 55% of the rural population. **India is the highest livestock owner of the world.**
 - Approximately **70% of India's milk supply** is sourced from farmers who own less than five animals.
 - However, problems such as [bovine mastitis](#) (alone) amount to a **milk loss of approximately 10 litres per day per farm** translating to about ₹300-₹350 per day.
 - Hence, for most farmers, death of or disease in livestock could mean the difference between sustenance and starvation.
 - The animal health issue is also compounded by the **growing presence of salesmen of drug distributors** in rural communities.
- **Government Initiatives for Livestock:**
 - [Rashtriya Gokul Mission:](#) To develop and conserve indigenous breeds of bovine population and enhance milk production and to make it more remunerative to the farmers.

- **National Livestock Mission:** To ensure quantitative and qualitative improvement in livestock production systems and capacity building of all stakeholders.
- **National Artificial Insemination Programme:** To suggest novel methods of bringing about impregnation in female breeds.
 - To prevent the spread of certain diseases which are genital in nature, thereby enhancing the efficiency of the breed.
- **Reforms in Livestock Health and Disease Control Programme:** The Government revised provisions of this programme by including '**Establishment and Strengthening of Veterinary Services - Mobile Veterinary Units (MVUs)**'.
 - A typical MVU is a four-wheeler van, with working space for one veterinarian, one para-veterinarian and a driver-cum-attendant.
 - It will be **built on the doorstep delivery model**
 - It also has space for essentials such as equipment for diagnosis, treatment and minor surgery, other basic requirements for the treatment of animals, audio-visual aids for awareness creation and GPS tracking of vehicles.

Challenges Associated to Livestock Health

- **Inadequate Testing:** The **Parliamentary Standing Committee** of the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying has observed that inadequate testing and treatment facilities for veterinary diseases pose a major challenge.
 - This problem is further exacerbated in the current scenario where there is a **drastic rise in cases of zoonotic diseases.**
- **Untrained Animal Health Workers:** Untrained animal health workers have been **popular in rural India as they charge less** for consultations and are easily accessible.
 - This has led to the **inappropriate administration of antibiotics** because of flawed prescriptions especially in cases of mastitis.
- **Increase in AMR:** Consequently, problems pertaining to **antimicrobial resistance (AMR)** occur when the animal no longer responds to a drug to which it was originally responsive.
 - AMR can be caused because of factors such as high or low dosages, incorrect duration of medication, and overprescription.
- **Issues in Accessing Credit:** The **M.K. Jain Committee Report** has highlighted that livestock farmers face **greater challenges in comparison to traditional agricultural farmers** especially while **accessing credit and livestock insurance.**
 - Lack of availability of credit further discourages the farmers from accessing vet services for their livestock.

Way Forward

- **Mitigating AMR:** The **World Health Organisation (WHO)** has listed antibiotic-resistant "priority pathogens" — a catalogue of 12 species/families of bacteria that pose the greatest threat to human health.
 - The **MVU model will mitigate the issue of antimicrobial resistance** and is in alignment with the 'One Health vision' laid down by the Global Action Plan of WHO.
- **MVUs for Livestock:** The LH&DC scheme envisages one MVU for one lakh animals; however, the number of vans in use could be higher in regions with difficult terrain.
 - The **availability of MVU's must be assured in sufficient numbers, even in difficult to reach areas**, so that merely geographical location does not hinder the reach of better veterinary services.
- **Private Sector Involvement:** There is a **great deal of scope for innovations and intervention by the private sector** in the context of animal health and MVUs.
 - The lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic have already witnessed innovations by start-ups, video consultation sessions between livestock farmers and veterinarians, along with apps that provide detailed information to farmers on livestock health and nutrition.
 - Further, with the growing prevalence of the **Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model**, the MVU model is poised to generate higher returns on investment.

Discuss the challenges faced by the livestock farmers in rural India.

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