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## The role of women in livestock production in eastern Turkey

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### ABSTRACT

As part of a livestock consultancy in eastern Turkey Lincoln International consultants surveyed rural women to define their role in livestock management and their priorities for extension. The results of group interviews of 200 women in 19 villages showed that men are the agricultural decision makers, except in the few villages where men have off-farm employment. Women are responsible for milking of animals. They may assist with lambing and calving, cleaning animal houses and feeding stock. Women were aware of the effects of animal disease and poor nutrition on animal productivity, effects they observed during daily milking. They expressed an interest in receiving information on animal health. Non agricultural problems identified were effective family planning, education for girls, and water supply for those villages without water piped to a central location.

**Keywords:** rural women; eastern Turkey; livestock management; extension.

### INTRODUCTION

The authors were contracted by Lincoln International Ltd. to provide the extension and livestock feeding consultancy to the Bingol-Mus Rural Development Project in eastern Turkey. This project, funded by the Government of Turkey and the International Fund for Agricultural Development, aimed at improving the living standards of poor rural people.

Rural households in Eastern Turkey typically have 30 to 100 sheep or goats, and 1 to 6 cows. Rural families own small holdings frequently less than 1 ha and these are used for gardening, cereal cropping or growing lucerne for hay. Each village communally owns the surrounding land and management decisions are by consensus. For 8 months stock are grazed on common land and for the 4 months of winter stock are housed and fed indoors due to snow and cold conditions. In spring and autumn pasture close to a village is grazed. In mid April livestock are taken to more distant, usually higher altitude pastures and the pastures close to the village are closed for hay making. The timing of the shift in grazing area is determined by community consensus and occurs about 6 weeks after snow melt. Hay making commences in June, 6 to 8 weeks after grazing stops. There is little mechanization in the hay making process. The common method is to hand scythe the pasture and immediately hand rake the swath into 3 kg bundles. These are eventually accumulated into 40 to 50 kg bundles that are tied with hand made twine. These large bundles are then stacked close to the animal houses where stock will be wintered. In late summer (August) stock return to the pastures closer to the village for grazing, and again the timing of this shift is decided by village consensus.

Animal products are milk from ewes, does and cows, and wool from sheep. Surplus animals are sold for meat. Most rural people are in a subsistence system with milk products and wool used within the village. There is limited opportunity

to market produce unless a village is within about 15 km of an urban centre.

Background papers to the project, and general descriptions of the rural social system in eastern Turkey (Drake 1987) suggest that women have a major role in livestock management. To assess the extent of women's involvement in livestock management and their priorities for extension an interview survey was undertaken during September and October 1992.

### THE SURVEY

Language differences between the consultants and rural women required English/Turkish/Kurdish translation, poor literacy of rural women and the dominance of men influenced the organization of meetings and survey data collection. A female consultant, working through a female Turkish/English translator, sought the views of 200 rural women in 19 villages on their role in livestock management, their responsibility for agricultural decision making and major problems affecting their standard of living.

#### Language and literacy

Few women in the Bingol-Mus region are literate in the Turkish language making written questionnaires inappropriate, hence an interview approach was used to gather information. Although schooling is undertaken in Turkish many women do not speak this language. The rural people in eastern Turkey are Kurds and Kurdish is the main language spoken in rural homes. In contrast, rural men speak both Turkish and Kurdish as Turkish is the language of commerce and government. This resulted in the need for double translation of English to Turkish to Kurdish and vice versa as the people who acted as translators did not speak Kurdish. The same questions were presented at each meeting and through discussion, a consensus response to each question was reached.

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## Male dominance

Turkey is a Muslim country, consequently in many aspects of Turkish life men and women have little social contact. Many women do not communicate with men apart from males of their immediate family making it essential to use a female consultant working with a female translator to obtain information from village women. If men were present at the village meetings they automatically acted as spokesperson without consulting the women. Where possible, the specific survey questions were not asked until all men had been persuaded to leave a meeting.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Agricultural decision makers and household structure

At 17 of the 19 meetings women stated that men are the agricultural decision-makers, and women are not consulted. In two villages relatively close to a larger urban centre where many men had employment off-farm, women had considerable responsibility for daily farm and animal management and decision-making. Widows usually made their own decisions unless they had a son of suitable age.

Rural households are usually large often with 10 to 20 people across three or four generations. The marriageable age of girls is between 16 and 20 years. After marriage a young couple may live in the husband's family home where the daughter-in-law assists with the production and preparation of food, and other activities that are traditionally the responsibility of women. Commonly there were more women than men in a rural household because young men seek work in urban areas. Many young married men go to Germany for 5 to 10 years. The wife remains behind in a household, and the men of that household make decisions related to livestock owned by the young couple. Frequently the livestock are sold.

### Women's and Men's role in agriculture production

Women identified milking as their main duty related to livestock. Milking begins in February or March, two or three weeks after parturition and is usually undertaken twice daily for 4 to 6 months. In summer when stock are moved to higher ground usually at a distance from the village, women either spend considerable time walking twice daily to the flock for milking, or they camp beside the flock and process milk collected into cheese or butter. Men or children are responsible for shepherding and herding stock while grazing as there are no fences and land is owned and managed on a communal basis. During summer men spend long hours making hay. Men are usually responsible for the marketing of livestock and dairy produce.

During February and March (late winter) women assist with lambing and calving which occurs while the animals are housed. Men usually undertake the daily feeding of stock and the cleaning of the animal houses, although some women may be involved in these tasks. Cleanings from the animal houses are sun dried and used as fuel for fires and much of this fuel preparation work is undertaken by women.

The casual observer of rural communities in eastern Turkey may be excused for gaining the impression that much of the work with livestock is undertaken by women. Men, when not working, congregate at village tea houses and as a consequence are readily observed whereas Muslim women do not socialize in public locations. During spring and summer all members of the family assist with labour intensive agricultural tasks. As rural households include more women than men, the casual observer gains the overriding impression that women undertake the majority of this work. In much of eastern Turkey livestock farming is the dominant agricultural activity and cropping is limited to small areas of cereals for domestic food and limited areas of cash cropping in the river valleys. Women undertake much of the planting of cash crops such as tobacco, and reaping and threshing of cereals by hand. They also undertake the labour intensive processing of foods; of grains into flour or pasta; milk into yoghurt, butter and cheese; and the harvesting, drying and preserving of garden crops.

### Livestock extension activities to benefit women

At nine of the meetings women identified disease as a major factor limiting animal production. The close daily contact women have with livestock during milking made them aware of the health status of the flock and the depressive effect disease and poor nutrition has on production. They expressed an interest in receiving information about treatment and prevention of disease and livestock feeding. This interest may have been influenced by the interpreter as she was a veterinarian. Women appeared to have a limited knowledge of basic husbandry associated with parturition such as the importance of colostrum for the neonate, a clean area in the animal house for parturition, the treatment of umbilical cords with disinfectant, or the need for disposal of placentae for hygienic considerations.

Their interest in gaining more knowledge of animal health and animal feeding indicates a potentially receptive target group for a well executed extension activity. However there are many constraints inherent in the infrastructure of the rural extension service that affect the implementation of such a programme. A primary limitation is that due to cultural aspects extension to women should be undertaken by women and few women are employed in the extension service who could undertake livestock extension work. In both Bingol and Mus provinces the extension service includes a group of female home economists who train women in domestic orientated activities such as carpet making, food preservation and baby care. These extension personnel do not have technical training related to livestock. There is a scarcity of women trained in livestock production as only 7 out of 170 veterinarians and agricultural graduates in Bingol and Mus provinces are women. The problems of achieving effective rural extension work is further discussed by Thompson and Hart (1994).

### Other needs

The survey identified other problems faced by rural women. These were the need for family planning (11 meet-

ings), improvement in education for girls (3 meetings) and for five villages with out a water supply, a piped supply to a central location was considered a major need.

### Timing of meetings

Meetings with women held in the afternoon were better attended than those held in the morning. Preference for afternoon meetings was due to women being committed in the mornings to domestic work, milking and other agricultural work. Cognizance of this meeting time preference may be important for effective extension work with rural women.

### Recommendations from the survey

Recommendations developed from the results of this survey have been discussed with regional agricultural staff in Bingol and Mus provinces, and reported formally to the Government of Turkey (Aspinall, Thompson and Hart, 1992). Recommendations were restricted to those considered feasible within the existing system because of the difficulties of implementing livestock extension programmes specifically for women. The only recommendation that related directly to women was for home economist extension personnel to plan and implement demonstrations on milking and milk processing hygiene. Other recommendations with possible side benefits for women were aimed at improved environmental conditions. Animal health status and productivity could be improved by better hygiene, modifying animal houses to increase ventilation and lighting, an increased use of diagnostic services to establish disease status and remedial actions to

reduce lamb mortality and disease and ewe disease in early lactation. Technology for this exists in Turkey.

While these recommendations received positive reaction from Government officials, major changes in technical training and further development of an effective extension service will be required to achieve significant improvement to benefit women.

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