

Case study

Animal welfare: adding value to the livestock and meat trade



Extensive grazing is key to meeting the standards set for Namibia's vibrant livestock industry

Animal welfare is increasingly important in the trade of animal produce, not least because it can provide an advantage in terms of access to markets. Meeting good standards of animal welfare 'from farm to fork' can form part of a strategy to add value to animal-based food products and provide a stable source of income for both large and small-scale producers. This case study shows how a nationwide set of farming standards that include animal welfare is contributing to the success of Namibia's meat industry and, in doing so, is encouraging social, economic and environmental stability in rural areas.

Setting the scene: livestock farming in Namibia

The Namibian Agricultural Union estimates that 70 per cent of the Namibian population are directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods, with the main component being livestock.

In this country's semi-arid, rainfed conditions, extensive grazing is the only production system that can viably sustain the nation's vibrant agricultural sector. Though often seen as environmentally inefficient¹ and providing only a small amount of meat², countries like Namibia rely on extensive systems – in which animals graze outdoors freely – as the backbone of their rural economy. These systems have a number of advantages: in addition to enabling better animal health and welfare, the appropriate management of livestock grazing is vital to the maintenance of pastureland and wider ecosystems.

This case study shows how a defined set of farming standards – standards that include animal welfare and which are met by well managed extensive grazing systems – are working well for animals and producers in Namibia by having a positive impact across four key areas of national concern.

1. The economy, jobs and livelihoods

Applying farming standards that include traceability, quality, and high levels of animal welfare is helping to increase the incomes of producers, processors and others employed in the livestock sector and associated services by enabling export and access to niche markets. This economic growth is having a positive impact on social stability in rural Namibia.

2. Public health

The standards ensure complete traceability of meat products, which means peace of mind for the consumer. A number of abattoirs that process the meat are inspected and approved by European Union and South African authorities and are in the process of being approved by the United States Department of Agriculture. Extensive grazing means all animals are raised on natural pastures without the use of preventative antibiotics, hormones, or feed of animal origin.

3. The environment and land use

The semi-arid and fragile nature of Namibia's pastureland requires the careful control of stocking density and rotational grazing in order to accommodate dry periods and avoid destruction by invasive bush. If correctly managed, the extensive grazing systems necessary to meet the standards can form part of a strategy to avoid the degradation of natural pastures.

4. Animal welfare

The farming standards include provision for animal welfare throughout production, transport and slaughter. This works with the country's wider strategy of moving towards the export of 'value added' products rather than live animals. This evolution will reduce the long-distance transport of animals for slaughter – a recognised and major animal welfare problem.

of cattle identification, especially at bulk-handling centres such as abattoirs and auctions, is already improving animal welfare. It allows for significantly less handling of animals, which leads to lower stress levels, fewer injuries and higher meat quality.

In addition, the success of the FAN Meat standards – in terms of the quality of the products and their adherence to export criteria – mean that Namibia is able to comply with private standards and supply to two of the leading supermarket chains in South Africa: Woolworths and Pick and Pay. Both these chains place a premium on the products that meet FAN Meat standards for their respective brands, *Free Range* and *Country Reared*.

What makes FAN Meat farmers different?

Farmers that meet the FAN Meat standards produce meat that is eligible for export to international markets. The standards encourage good practice by covering aspects of:

- farm management
- environmental stewardship
- animal welfare
- animal health
- pasture and feed (which is free of growth promoters or animal sources)
- identification and traceability
- record-keeping.

Specific emphasis is placed on the handling and transport of livestock.⁴

Social and economic impacts of the standards

Agriculture contributes 4 per cent to the Namibian economy and is dominated by the livestock sector, which represents 80 per cent of the total agricultural value.⁵ With nearly 1.5 million people – of a total of 2.1 million inhabitants – dependent on agriculture, any initiative that encourages the meat industry to flourish also helps to **grow employment and provide economic stability** for many farmers and their families.

Namibia has around 2.3 million cattle, 2.6 million sheep and 2 million goats, but not all are raised in disease-free areas and therefore not all are able to meet the standards for export. However, every farmer trading in livestock for domestic consumption or export in the OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health) designated 'foot-and-mouth-disease free zone' – be they commercial (using privately-owned land) or communal (using government-owned land) – must comply with FAN Meat standards and must be a registered stock brand holder. This means being FAN Meat-compliant automatically indicates a farmer is in the disease-free zone, providing an **immediate market advantage**.

To process FAN Meat-certified produce and ensure the meat has added value, export slaughterhouses are compliant with European Union and South African regulations (also a **benefit to public health**). A total of three beef and three sheep abattoirs are certified to export to the European Union and are in the process of seeking similar certification from the United States Department of Agriculture to **open up exports** to the US market.

How the standards affect the environment and land use

With low and erratic rainfall levels, Namibia's extensive pastures must be well managed to accommodate dry periods and avoid invasive bush destroying pasture land.

The FAN Meat standards encourage the use of extensive grazing and of **good practice in pasture management**.

On commercial (privately-owned) land, cattle, sheep and goats graze in large paddocks of approximately 150-250 hectares; they are moved to fresh paddocks periodically to avoid overgrazing. Special attention is taken to avoid overstocking and farmers are active in monitoring bush encroachment, uprooting bush if that becomes a problem. Communal (government-owned) land poses extra challenges because fencing of property is not allowed and animals are free to roam. Overstocking is an issue but communities are together actively tackling the issue. Community leaders in particular have a key role and are actively mentoring farmers.

The animals graze on natural pastures their entire lives and only receive additional feed during the dry season or if the pastures are deficient in nutrients (also keeping input costs low for small scale farmers). Water is freely available following investment by commercial farmers and the government in boreholes and dams to store reserves. The cattle and sheep breeds farmed have been selected to cope well with the conditions of extensive grazing, meaning they can stay healthy and productive in this environment.

How the standards affect animal welfare

The FAN Meat standards can only be met by extensive grazing, which has many welfare benefits for animals, enabling them to express their natural behaviours and maintain good health due to low stress levels afforded by open spaces. The animal welfare aspect of the standards extend right through 'from farm to fork', meaning better handling during transport and humane slaughter as well as during rearing.

This focus on welfare enables Namibia's meat industry to provide 'value added' products for export markets, where the absence of cruelty is a selling point. Moving into this 'value added' market and away from the export of live animals – a practice closely associated with poor welfare – has been a strategic decision based on both welfare concerns and economic considerations.

Ms Cecilia Mbavanga is one small-scale farmer gaining a market advantage by ensuring her livestock are kept in accordance with FAN Meat standards



Introducing the Farm Assured Namibian Meat standards

The Farm Assured Namibian Meat (FAN Meat) standards are set and administered by the Meat Board of Namibia – an independent body representing all major meat industry stakeholders – in close association with the government Directorate of Veterinary Services (DVS), export abattoirs and the country's livestock producers.

All producers are encouraged to meet the standards, which assure export-level quality and traceability and are monitored by DVS district offices. They are continuously updated in accordance with requirements set by importing countries and discerning overseas consumers and retailers, and have contributed to an ever-increasing international demand for quality Namibian meat products. This is vital: Namibia's meat industry is now strongly export-oriented, with South Africa, the European Union and Norway forming its most important markets. In terms of value, meat exports represent 3 per cent of all national exports and are a vital component of the agricultural sector, so meeting the requirements of the new markets in terms of animal welfare, quality and traceability is crucial.³

The traceability criteria of export markets are met by using an individual cattle identification system. In 2011 double ear tagging with a set of electronic and visual ear tags became mandatory. This tagging system is used in conjunction with an internet database that enables animals' movements to be traced throughout their lives in Namibia. Electronic reading

Setting standards on a community farm

Cecelia Mbavanga's farm, in Okandjira village, is a typical Namibian homestead. Ms Mbavanga practises mixed farming, which combines livestock (dual-purpose cattle, sheep and goats) and crops. The family has been farming livestock for 45 years; it is now their primary source of income. The farm has 30 crossbreed cattle – ideally suited to local conditions – comprising 15 adult cows, one bull, 10 calves and four heifers as well as five sheep and 20 goats. This family-run farm relies on communal pasture grazing, in which animals owned by different families graze together.

By meeting the FAN Meat standards, the Mbavangas' farm has been able to access premium markets, and with an annual income of around 20,000 Namibian dollars (US\$ 2,500), the family considers the enterprise profitable. Following the standards has also helped Cecelia with record keeping and better management of her herd. The grazing system necessary to meet the standards is low input (the cows feed on pasture) which allows Cecelia to keep production costs low and retain higher profits – she has been able to help her four children reach university using income from the farm.

In addition to the sale of meat, the dual-purpose cattle also provide 15 litres of milk daily which are sold locally for extra income. An additional five litres are used for household consumption, enriching the family's diet.

Challenges and the way forward

The FAN Meat standards are being continuously revised; the most up to date version was rolled out in 2010. The biggest challenge at the present time is to ensure its national implementation and the inspection of as many farms as possible that have adopted the new standards.

A second challenge is ensuring that animal disease is controlled. This is a key concern for all world meat industries, including that of Southern Africa. The sporadic occurrence of foot-and-mouth disease in the foot-and-mouth infected zone (mainly due to the presence of free-ranging buffalo as well as inadequate veterinary control), and the prevalence of lung sickness (CBPP) in some herds in the northern communal areas pose a major setback to the progress of the meat industry and livelihoods.

The Namibian meat industry, however, is proactive in its approach to this threat and – brought together by the FAN Meat standards – the relevant authorities are engaging in disease surveillance and control. To support this, the Meat Board assists the Directorate of Veterinary Services by supplying a presence at the borders of Ariamsvlei and Noordoewer as well as with active engagement in international border fence repair, payment of laboratory testing for meat residues and hosting the country's stock brands and traceability databases.⁶

Produce that meets FAN Meat standards is a 'value added' product that can retail at a premium at home and abroad

Conclusion

The introduction of the FAN Meat standards – which set clear and measurable quality criteria for the Namibian livestock and meat sector – has:

- assisted Namibia's livestock industry in marketing its products and enabling access to key international markets, economically benefiting both small and large-scale producers
- provided important guidance to the country's livestock producers on how to keep cattle healthy and productive, cutting cases of illness and improving animal welfare
- encouraged better stewardship of the land and protected the environment by putting a focus on and offering advice regarding the careful management of pastureland
- created a system of traceability that safeguards human health and gives international consumers product confidence, creating 'added value' for both local and foreign markets
- demonstrated how the collaboration of national veterinary services and the private sector can contribute to and improve animal welfare standards.

Acknowledgements

WSPA wishes to acknowledge the support, information and facilitation of field visits kindly provided by Dr Susanne Thalwitzer, Coordinator, FAN Meat Scheme. In addition, WSPA wishes to acknowledge the support and information provided by the Meat Board of Namibia and in particular from its General Manager Paul Strydom.

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