

# India's Thriving Livestock Sector: A Pillar of Rural Economy and National Growth

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## *Abstract*

India's livestock sector stands as a cornerstone of the nation's agrarian economy, sustaining rural livelihoods and strengthening food security. With one of the world's largest livestock populations, the sector plays a multifaceted role like generating income for smallholder farmers, providing employment, particularly for women, and supplying essential protein-rich foods. Its integration with crop farming enhances resource efficiency, while its resilience offers economic stability during agricultural downturns. Despite its contributions, the sector struggles with systemic challenges, including low productivity, inadequate infrastructure, and vulnerability to disease outbreaks and climate shocks. Addressing these constraints requires targeted investments in veterinary services, breed improvement, and sustainable practices. Government initiatives and technological innovations hold promise for transforming the sector, boosting productivity, and ensuring equitable growth. As demand for animal-derived products rises, the livestock sector is poised to expand further, reinforcing its critical role in India's rural development and economic progress. By bridging gaps in policy and practice, India can harness this sector's full potential to uplift rural communities and strengthen its position in global markets.

**Key words :-** Livestock Sector, Rural Economy, Economic Development, Sustainable Agriculture

## **1. Introduction: -**

Livestock farming has been an integral part of India's agrarian economy for centuries, supporting millions of rural households with food, income, and employment. As one of the largest producers of milk, eggs, and meat in the world, India's livestock sector plays a crucial role in ensuring nutritional security, reducing poverty, and sustaining agricultural livelihoods. Most of the people in India is majorly dependent on the livestock sector for

their livelihood, that is around 20.5 million people are being benefitted from the livestock sector (S Dash, 2017).

## **2. Current Status of India's Livestock Sector**

India is home to around 536 million livestock (20th Livestock Census, 2019 ) showing an increase of 4.8 % from the previous livestock census 2012. The sector contributes 4.11% to India's GDP and nearly 25.6% to the agricultural

GDP (Economic Survey 2022-23). India now leads the world in milk production, accounting for nearly a 24% of the global supply due to a significant increase in output. (DAHD, 2023).

There is also a large gap between the population of livestock in rural and urban areas where around 514.11 million and 22.65 million can be found in rural and urban areas respectively ( 20th Livestock Census, 2019) which clearly indicates that the people in rural regions are the major beneficiaries from the livestock sector.

### 3.India's dominance in global livestock production: -

**Milk Production:** India holds the number one position globally, contributing an astounding 24.76% of the world's milk production. Milk production has seen a robust CAGR of 5.62% over the past decade, reaching 239.30 million tonnes in 2023-24. The per capita availability of milk in India stands at 471 grams per day (2023-24), significantly higher than the world average of 329 grams.

**Egg Production:** India ranks 2nd globally in egg production.

**Meat Production:** India is the 5th largest meat producer worldwide, with buffalo meat being a significant export commodity. (FAOSTAT, 2024; Economic Survey,2024).

### 4.Supporting Livelihoods and Enhancing Social Security

The impact of the livestock sector extends far beyond its economic metrics, serving as a vital source of livelihood for approximately 20.5 million individuals, and contributing to the employment of about 8.8% of India's population. For small and marginal farmers, particularly landless households, livestock rearing often

represents the primary source of income and a critical asset.

**Income Generation:** Livestock provides a consistent source of income, particularly through milk sales, offering financial stability to rural families. Animals are often considered "moving banks" that can be sold during emergencies, offering a crucial social security net. (Khillare R, S and Muskan Kaushal, 2021)

**Employment Opportunities:** The livestock industry serves as a crucial source of self-employment, absorbing surplus agricultural labor during periods of seasonal farming inactivity. Women play a particularly pivotal role, accounting for over 50% of rural women engaged in livestock activities, contributing to their income and financial independence. (KC Bairwa *et. al* ,2013)

**Nutritional Security:** Livestock ensures food security by providing protein-rich products like milk, eggs, and meat, contributing significantly to the nutritional well-being of the population.

**Integrated Farming Systems:** Livestock rearing is an integral part of mixed farming systems in India, where the output of one enterprise becomes the input for another, promoting resource efficiency and sustainability.

### 5.Addressing Challenges and Charting the Future

Despite its remarkable growth and significant contributions to the Indian economy, the livestock sector in India confronts several persistent challenges. A primary concern is the relatively low productivity of livestock, particularly in dairy and meat production, when compared to global benchmarks. This often stems from inadequate infrastructure across various aspects of the sector. Shortcomings are evident in areas such as breed quality, optimal

feeding practices, the availability and reach of veterinary services, the presence of robust cold chain facilities, and the modernization of slaughterhouses. These deficiencies collectively lead to significant post-harvest losses and restrict market access for livestock products.

Furthermore, the sector grapples with recurring disease outbreaks and the escalating issue of antimicrobial resistance. Animal diseases pose a constant and substantial threat to livestock health and productivity, while the rising prevalence of antimicrobial resistance in livestock populations is a growing concern for both animal welfare and public health [9]. Climate change also presents a formidable challenge, with erratic weather patterns and rising temperatures negatively impacting fodder availability and overall animal health. Simultaneously, livestock farming itself contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, particularly methane, highlighting a need for more sustainable practices.

## 6. Conclusion: -

The livestock sector is undeniably a fundamental component of India's rural economy and a significant catalyst for national advancement. Its extensive contributions to income generation, employment, food security, and social welfare are immense. While challenges persist, the collaborative efforts by the government, combined with the increasing demand for animal products and ongoing technological innovations, are paving the way for a more productive, sustainable, and prosperous livestock sector in India.

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