

Cattle fattening - blessing or threat?

The risky world of growth hormones and steroids



PHOTO: MD. MUKUL HOSSAIN

Although Zakir Hossain follows natural beef fattening methods, his farm in Munshiganj is still a commercially feasible venture.

SHYKH SERAJ

We can hardly look at the rain outside and not feel the need to have khichuri and beef. But are we aware about how safe the beef is for our consumption? Apart from using cows for ploughing farmlands and milk production, cow farming contributes to the supply of meat across Bangladesh. Beef fattening was introduced as a commercial initiative years ago in the country. It's been ages that farmers followed traditional fattening strategies. But, at one stage, scientists invented new technologies for fattening cows. In the course of time, cow fattening became a commercially attractive venture. Around the country, many seasonal entrepreneurs established cow fattening projects. Targeting Eid-ul-Adha, all these projects have become real threats. In most cases, cow fattening is done using harmful medicines. Growth hormones, steroids, overdose of chemicals fatten the cows in a very short time. Livestock researchers have expressed a lot of concern over this issue. Recently, I spoke to experts on how a cow is fattened after they are given steroids, harmful hormones or chemical solutions.

"If you give steroids to the cows, they severely hamper the kidney and liver of the animal. Due to malfunction of the kidney, more water is retained in the body and the cows look bigger. That is not really cow fattening", says Dr. Md. Hasan, a livestock expert. Though apparently the cows look larger, they ultimately

get affected with various diseases. You don't see it from the outside, but at one stage they die. "In extreme cases, it is possible for humans to die after eating the meat. All of us have to remain alert", adds Dr. Hasan. We can assume that this is a serious public health concern.

Many cows of beef fattening projects in Bangladesh suffered this tragic fate during Eid-ul-Adha in 2013. In a short time after the festival, many of the unsold cows died at the farms to which they returned. Many farmers have complained that due to these beef fattening methods, customers are not attracted to the naturally grown cows, which looker slimmer in comparison. But, how would customers differentiate between cows grown in a healthy and natural way and those fattened artificially?

The sick cow won't act normal. It will look dizzy. It'll not move much. Since it is sick, it will stand at one place, stationary. That is abnormal. A normal cow is full of life. Those cows will show movement. Customers need to buy those. The cows which stands still and don't move even after you push them, never buy these cows.

At the Indian border regions in Bangladesh, cow fattening is a common practice. I went to a fattening farm situated in Kustia Sadar's Kumarpara, owned by Shawkat Kazi. He sells cows worth millions of taka every year from this farm. He complains that as cows come legally and also illegally from India during the Eid-ul-Adha season, local farmers have more competition and often are unable to turn a profit as

a consequence. When there are numerous farms growing and fattening their cows following unnatural methods, we got the news of a farm where cows are fattened following pure, natural ways. The farm follows the right rules and feed their cows with nutrients. I went to Zakir Hossain's farm in Munshiganj's Dakhhin Courtgaon village. He and his brothers follow natural beef fattening method and it's still a commercially feasible venture. Some other farmers have followed their footsteps in this region. The cow farm has made Zakir a big farmer in the region. He also cultivates potato on hundreds of bighas of land. His farming initiatives are the main force behind his revolutionary development. Zakir spends most of his time at his cow farm. His years of experience have helped him develop an intuition about when the cows need what.

The surrounding of the farm is very open. A small shade-house just beside the farm produces nutrient food for the cows. They're making khud rice for the cows. They mix chickpea, wheat husk and oilcakes in the rice to make it nutritious. Farmers are also feeding the cows green grass. Zakir says this is the most advanced and scientific way of beef fattening following traditional and natural means. "For standard beef fattening, first you need to build a perfect farmhouse. It should have proper drainage system. You have to clean the farm and give them quality food- wheat husk, chickpea, rice bran etc. You can get a quality cow if you follow these rules", says Zakir. "Most of the customers are attracted to brawny cows when they buy cows during Eid-ul-Adha. They can't identify the healthy cows which have been grown naturally and often end up buying the ones which have been fattened harmfully", complains Zakir. He is an exception, as are his cows. Not only do the cows get healthy and natural foods here, they are washed, and the

places is cleaned regularly. Besides, they also feed the cows worm medicines, separate the diseased cows from the healthy ones. They follow strict rules to market the cows. Zakir's two brothers, Jewel and Ziaur are monitoring these vital factors. "These cows are like my children. We are proud of what how we raise them", says Jewel. "We earn from this farm and from cultivating potatoes. We're also growing jute, mustard seed and paddies", says Ziaur. In the future Zakir and his brothers want to expand the farm.

The spirit of Eid-ul-Adha is sacrifice. Every Muslim intends to set an example with this holy sacrifice. Islam has clearly ruled that the animals should be pin-perfect for the sacrifice. But some unscrupulous people are trying to make money through cow fattening by injecting harmful growth hormones, chemicals and antibiotics. This is not only unexpected but in the light of Islam, this is a crime. This is a serious public health concern. Exact statistics about the use and spread of these methods are now known, but, if unchecked, they threaten to replace traditional and natural methods which will make beef consumption a serious risk. We expect such harmful practices to be monitored and stopped immediately. Good practice of traditional beef fattening needs to spread among the farmers. A strategy needs to be devised to raise awareness amongst cattle farmers as well the government about taking the good initiative.

This is actually a problem that affects the people of Bangladesh throughout the year, specially during Eid-ul-Adha. We hope that the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries of the Government will take required steps to monitor this issue and take necessary action in this regard. Besides this, we also request the people of Bangladesh to learn more about identifying healthy and traditionally grown cows and to stay alert about this very urgent issue, especially in the days leading up to Eid-ul-Adha in October 2014.



Shykh Seraj is an Agriculture Development and Media Activist. He is an Ashoka Fellow and an FAO A.H. Boerma Awardee. At Channel i, he is Director and Head of News. He is also Director, Planner and Presenter of the popular Agro-Documentary "Hridoye Mati O Manush".

Beggar rehabilitation programme begins in Thakurgaon

QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT, Thakurgaon

A beggar rehabilitation programme was inaugurated at Awliapur union in Thakurgaon sadar upazila on Saturday.

Deputy Commissioner Mukesh Chandra Biswas distributed homestead land documents for living, milking cows and financial assistance for erecting houses, grocery shops and running capital for small business to five local beggars through a vibrant inaugural programme held at Awliapur Union Parishad Complex. Each person got valuable and cash worth Tk.1-lakh for those purposes.

Eco Social Development Organisation (ESDO) implemented the programme under 'Samridhi' (Enrich) project with the financial assistance of Palli Karma Sohayak Foundation (PKSF).

Out of 61 beggars that were enlisted, five were chosen and these five will be provided with a piece of land, house building material, cow, grocery shop material and as running capital of small business worth Tk one lakh in the first phase.

Of the five beneficiaries, Jogeswar Barman, 60, got land document of 30-decimoil of land which was mortgaged earlier to local money launder involving Tk.65,000, house building material of Tk.25,000 for erecting new house, a newly set up pashop (betel leaf shop) spending Tk.5,000 and Tk.5,000 as capital to run the shop.

Joyrob Rani Barman, 55, was given two milking cows worth Tk.60,000, animal feed

worth Tk.3,000, a cowshed at a cost Tk.10,000, a newly built grocery shop involving Tk.10,000 and Tk.17,000 in cash.

Visually impaired Sagor Chandra Roy, 40, got two milking cows worth Tk.60,000, animal feed Tk.3,000, newly built house involving Tk.25,000, a newly set up shop structure involving Tk.5,000 and Tk.7,000 in cash.

Darajul Islam, 55, was distributed two milking cows of Tk.60,000, its feed Tk.3,000, a newly built house of Tk.25,000, complete pashop at a cost Tk.5,000 and Tk.7,000 in cash for running shop.

Belal Hossain, 50, who is blind by birth, also got two milking cows worth Tk.60,000, newly made house involving Tk.25,000 and Tk.15,000 in cash.

In the opening session Executive Engineer of Public Health Department Altafar Rahman and Executive Director of Eco Social Development Organisation (ESDO) Dr. Muhammad Shahid Uz Zaman attended as special guest while UP Chairman of Awliapur Union Parishad Md. Jafrullah in the chair.

Appreciating the programme activities, the speakers said the nation would be able to stand up with a strong backbone, if we can refrain from extending pleads to others for gaining breads.

Executive Director of ESDO Dr. Muhammad Shahid Uz Zaman said, "we have launched such programme in the union with the assistance of PKSF for making a model of rooting out poverty."



Deputy Commissioner Mukesh Chandra Biswas hands over a cow to Belal Hossain.



PHOTO: STAR

Smoke from burning discarded synthetic sandals, used as fuel for melting bitumen, poses serious health risk for pedestrians and commuters. The photo was taken from Paharpur in Dinajpur town on Monday.

Cutting road repair cost at the cost of people's health

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

Discarded rubber and sponge sandals are being burnt instead of wood and diesel to melt bitumen to repair the potholed roads under the municipality, exposing the townspeople to serious health hazards.

Recently the municipality authorities have taken steps to repair different roads that have remained in awful conditions for years.

But the initiative has turned nightmare for passers-by and commuters as burning of waste rubber sandals emit huge black smoke, making it tough for nearby people to breathe.

During a visit to see the repair work of Paharpur-Lilymoor road under the municipality on Thursday, the correspondent found black smoke engulfing the area as plastic sandals were being burnt to melt bitumen.

"They can use husk of paddy or other things as fuel to heat up the bitumen. I can't understand why they are using these sandals for the purpose,"

said Azgar Ali, a resident of Paharpur in the municipality.

Thrown away sandals were also found piled up in front of Dinajpur municipality office complex as the authorities collected it to use as fuel to melt the bitumen for road repair.

Jahangir Alam, mayor of Dinajpur



PHOTO: STAR

Huge quantity of discarded sandals are piled up in front of Dinajpur municipality office. They have been collected to use as fuel for melting bitumen to repair roads in the town.

municipality, said, "The sandals are being used to melt the bitumen to save cost in repairing the roads as there shortage of fund for the purpose."

Tanvir Siddiqui, executive engineer (acting) of Roads and Highways Department of Dinajpur, said, "At least 150 degree Celsius temperature is required to melt the bitumen. Usually wood, diesel and residues of crops are used as fuel for the purpose, in view environmental issue."

Dr BK Bosh, an asthma specialist, also director of Bangladesh Atomic Treatment Centre, said, "Burning of waste plastic materials aggravate respiratory ailments, such as asthma and emphysema. It causes rash, nausea, and headache, and poses the risk of heart disease, damage in kidney, liver, and the reproductive system."

"The burning of polystyrene polymers such as foam and plastics in different forms releases styrene in vapour form. Long term exposure to styrene can affect the eyes, mucous membranes and central nervous system," he added.

Cargo vessel sinks in Passur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

A clinker-laden cargo vessel sank in the Passur River in Mongla upazila yesterday morning.

Sources at Mongla Port said the cargo ship sank a Joymonighol point of the river around 9:00am after hitting another cargo vessel while heading towards Mongla port after uploading 650 tonnes of clinker (cement raw material) imported by Sena Kalyan Sangtha from a vessel near Harbaria.

None of the staff of the vessel, however, was injured. All eight safely swam ashore.

While returning to the SKS cement factory, the vessel hit another vessel on the way causing damage to the deck.

Earlier, on September 12, another clinker-laden cargo vessel along with 600 tonnes of clinker sank in the river near Harbaria. The vessel is yet to be salvaged.

Woman's body recovered

UNB, Sylhet

Police recovered the body of a young woman, mother of two children, from a jungle at Katalipara village in Bishwanath upazila on Monday afternoon.

The deceased was identified as Shilpi Begum, 24, wife of Lutfor Rahman, a resident of the same village.

Police said locals found the body of Shilpi near a pond of one Taiyab Ali of the village at about 4:00 pm and informed police.

Victim's family members said Samuz Ali, 50, a resident of Rahman Nagar village of the same upazila, had called Shilpi out of the house on Sunday night.

Police arrested Samuz Ali for his suspicious link to the killing.

Malnutrition remains

FROM PAGE 16

national budget to run some 70 to 90 different social safety net programmes, the target of reducing malnutrition significantly has not been achieved yet.

The IFPRI researched on some 5,000 ultra-poor women from 2012 to 2014 to test which of the SSNP transfer modalities -- cash; food; cash and food combination; or cash or food accompanied by a nutrition BCC component -- is the most effective one.

"Of the 5,000, we provided nutrition education to 1,000 only, while gave either food or cash or food-cash combination to the rest 4,000. And then we found that children and family members of those 1,000 ultra-poor women who got both cash/food and nutrition education are far better off," said Akhter, adding that the IFPRI would reveal the details of the research outcome through a workshop in Dhaka today.

According to available statistics, at least 37 percent children under five in Bangladesh are stunted. Each year, malnutrition kills 3.1 million children

under five globally and leaves 165 million stunted, trapping generations into poverty and unfulfilled potentials, says Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (Gain). Gain is an international organisation launched at the UN Special Session on Children in 2002 to tackle the human suffering caused by malnutrition.

Director General of the IFPRI Shenggen Fan, who was present at yesterday's press meet, said, "In two decades poverty rate has dropped by more than half but stunting rate remains still high."

He appreciated the Bangladesh prime minister's speech in New York recently highlighting food system's vulnerability to weather shocks particularly in the perspective of global climate change phenomenon.

IFPRI DG congratulated Bangladesh for taking the lead in introducing first genetically modified food crop (Bt Brinjal) in South Asia and said, "Our planet has very limited resources. We've to produce more from less [resources] to feed nine billion people by 2050. What is the magic here - it's

technology. So, biotechnology is a reality and it has great potential to address many climate-induced stress challenges."

Akhter said under the second phase of IFPRI's Policy Research and Strategy Support Program (PRSSP) for Food Security and Agricultural Development, they would keep a track on two crops -- Bt Brinjal and biofortified hi-zinc rice -- to observe their rate of adoption in Bangladesh and analyse cost-benefit aspects.

IFPRI Division Director of Development Strategy and Governance, Pau Dorosh, Director and Deputy Director for Division of Poverty, Health and Nutrition, Marie Ruel and John Hoddinott respectively, and its Senior Research Fellow Shahidur Rashid also spoke at the press briefing.

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury is scheduled to address as chief guest at the opening session of IFPRI's daylong workshop on "Evidence-based Policy Options for Food and Nutrition Security in Bangladesh," today.

Antibiotics linked

FROM PAGE 16

American researchers have found that broad-spectrum antibiotics were linked with an 11 percent increased risk of obesity by age five.

They warned that the findings were another reason to avoid the over-use of the drugs.

Previous studies have suggested that one in six courses of antibiotics fail to cure the infection they were prescribed for because bugs have developed resistance.

It is thought that antibiotics disrupt the gut bacteria in infants which may trigger weight gain.

Lead author Dr Charles Bailey, of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia said: "We have shown that repeated use of antibiotics, particularly broader-spectrum drugs, at younger than 24 months old is a risk factor for later obesity."

"Narrow-spectrum antibiotics, recommended as first-line treatment for common childhood infections, are not associated with obesity even after multiple exposures."

"Because the first 24 months of life comprise major shifts in diet, growth, and establishment of the intestinal microbiome, this

interval may comprise a window of particular susceptibility to antibiotic effects."

However he added that the study could not rule out that the babies had underlying medical conditions that might cause both an increased use of antibiotics and vulnerability to obesity or that their mode of birth might have influenced the results.

He said that results should encourage doctors to use drugs more narrowly focused to treat the infections the children have rather than using broad-spectrum medicines.