The Role of Yak Milk in Local Development of the Qilian Mountains, Tibetan Plateau, China

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Abstract

The yak milk production is based on small family farm, grazing and herd mobility. Milk production is just one of the multi-functions of yak herd: home consumption of dairy products, income of sales (butter, yogurts, calves ...) savings, manure for heating, wool & hairs, land access ... in harsh cold conditions in winter and spring.

The Great Challenge of the Rangeland Management in China

Rangeland covers around 68% of China, especially in the West and North regions.

- Sustainable rangeland management is a key-factor of water supply, soil erosion and biodiversity conservation. It directly impacts the national development, both in urban and rural areas, and the future scenarios at local and global scale.

- Relevancy of policiy to avoid rangeland degradation at local and national level.

The yak milk production is low at farm level:

- 1-2l/day/dairy yak from April-May to October
- But good food quality, especially fat and protein

A typical small family farm # 2-3 persons, 40-80 yaks, 150-200 sheep + some goats

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Conclusion:

Livestock farming systems in the Qilian Mountains are complex due to the multi-functions of the herd and the interactions between them. They also are efficient regarding the resources and conditions. The yak milk is already a key-factor of local development. Increase the contribution is not easy to imagine. It has to be planned linked to a sustainable rangeland management and viable livelihood of local society through an integrated and participative research & development program.

Other relevant considerations about the yak milk development

- Low attractive for youth
- High potential for ecotourism
- Social network strength

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