Livestock Census Data 2019

Why in news?

The 20th livestock census (2019) data was released recently by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare.

What does the data reveal?

- **Indigenous breeds** - The population of exotic and cross-bred cows has surged by nearly 27% since the last livestock census in 2012.
- However, the population of the indigenous and non-descript cattle has dipped by 6% per cent.
- The data thus makes it evident the futility of the government's controversial cow protection policies.
- The government has set up the Gokul Mission for the preservation and promotion of indigenous cattle breeds.
- Also, curbs were made on the movement and trade of cows, besides the controversial vigilantism by self-appointed cow protectors.
- Despite all these, cattle-keepers continue to prefer cross-bred cows and buffaloes over desi (indigenous) cows.
- **Domesticated animals** - The census shows that the population of several useful but low milk- or non-milk-yielding domesticated animals is dwindling rapidly.
- These include equines and bovines like horses, ponies, mules, donkeys, camels, and yak.
- These animals cumulatively constitute only about 0.23% of the country's vast livestock wealth.
- Nevertheless, these are useful in their own respect, with each one having its own unique qualities.
- The most dramatic fall is in the number of donkeys (61%) and mules (57%).
- If not protected, these animals may vanish in near future.

What is the case with the state of U.P.?

- The above trend is evident in Uttar Pradesh that has recorded the largest number of cases of vigilantism and lynching.
- The state government is directly involved in the cow conservation campaign.
- All district authorities have been asked to build goshalas (cow shelters) to

keep and feed cattle at government expense.

- A one-rupee cess has been imposed on every liquor bottle to raise funds for this purpose.
- Yet, the state's cattle population has declined by nearly 4%, while the buffalo count has risen by about 8%.
- The closing down of many old slaughter houses and preventing opening of new ones have resulted in a decline in the number of goats and sheep as well.
- This bodes ill for the export of mutton from the country's leading meat-exporting state.

What are the implications of cow protection measures?

- Stray cattle are not enumerated in the livestock census.
- But anecdotal evidence suggests a sharp increase in their numbers as a result of the ban on the movement and trade of cows.
- Earlier the old and unproductive cows used to be disposed of in the cattle bazaars.
- These are now let loose to roam about in the countryside, damaging crop fields and forests and competing with other livestock for fodder and feed resources.
- Farm organisations from all over the country are demanding an urgent solution to this menace.

What is the way forward?

- Clearly, the livestock-keepers' choice of the animals and their breeds is guided more by their utility rather than the government's diktat.
- This explains why the population of major milch animals is steady or on the rise while that of the draught animals is plummeting.
- [Draught animals are no longer in much demand due to the availability of mechanical alternatives.]
- The best way to popularise the pure-bred indigenous cows would be to boost their inherent milk yield.
- This could be taken up through selective breeding without altering their typical genetic makeup, which is adapted to local conditions.
- The policies concerning the movement and marketing of cows also need to be revisited for the benefit of the cattle owners and the overall livestock economy.

Source: Business Standard



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