

Dynamics of Ruminant Livestock Management in the Context of the Nigerian Agricultural System

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Among all the livestock that makes up the farm animals in Nigeria, ruminants, comprising sheep, goats and cattle, constitute the farm animals largely reared by farm families in the country's agricultural system. Nigeria has population of 34.5million goats, 22.1million sheep and 13.9million cattle. The larger proportion of these animals' population are however largely concentrated in the northern region of the country than the southern region. Specifically about 90 percent of the country's cattle population and 70 percent of the sheep and goat populations are concentrated in northern region of the country. Concentration of Nigeria's livestock-base in the northern region is most likely to have been influenced by the ecological condition of the region which is characterised by low rainfall duration, lighter sandy soils and longer dry season. This submission is predicated by the fact that drier tropics or semi-arid regions are more favourable to the ruminants, Notwithstanding this situation, certain breeds of sheep and goats, particularly the West African Dwarf (WAD) species, are peculiarly adapted to the southern (humid) region of the country and are commonly reared by rural households in the region. Although, no breed of cattle is peculiar to the southern humid region of Nigeria, the available cattle in the region was largely due to settlement of the Hausa/Fulani pastoralists, who constitute the main cattle rearers, in the region.