Sheep rearing is an important livelihood for small and marginal farmers of India. Sheep are efficient converters of unutilized poor quality grass and crop residues into meat, skin and wool. Some sections of the people practices migratory sheep management as a way of life and have acquired caste/community connotations as well, for example, the Raika community of Rajasthan. Migratory system of sheep production is traditional and popular in southern agro-climatic zone of Tamil Nadu. Migratory sheep production is a time tested livestock husbandry system. Sustainability of a production system depends on the demand for product and marketing channels. Marketing of sheep is not organized in our country and involves middlemen and commission agents. Under the present scenario, marketing is an essential as well as inevitable component of any production systems. Therefore, documentation of the existing marketing channels in migratory sheep production system is necessary to identify the opportunities for future development in sheep production. Keeping this in view, the present study was carried out to study the marketing practices followed by the migratory sheep farmers in southern Tamil Nadu.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The study was conducted purposively in the districts of Ramanathapuram, Sivagangai and Pudukkottai in Southern agro-climatic zone of Tamil Nadu where the migratory system of sheep production is practised as a traditional occupation by large number of sheep farmers. A total of hundred migratory sheep farmers were selected randomly in the study location and divided as small (≤ 175), medium (175- 350) and large (> 350) flocks based on the average flock size for comparison. Details on the buyers, market age, basis of price fixation, peak season for sale and mode of transport to sale point were collected. The data collected were subjected to standard statistical procedures.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Sale of surplus lambs, either for meat or breeding purpose, is the major source of income to the migratory sheep farmers, followed by revenue from penning and night folding of sheep. Sheep droppings were utilized by penning and night folding of sheep in agricultural fields during summer months. The penning site was changed almost every day and during time of changing, the sheep were let loose in the empty fields. The migratory sheep farmers charged @ Rs. 1.00 to Rs. 1.50 /night/sheep from owners of the agricultural fields in lieu of fertilization of the land by penning the sheep flocks. During the rainy season, the enclosure was not changed; but remained for about 3 months in the spot and the sheep droppings were swept, collected and stored as heap in an adjoining place on daily basis. The sale price for sheep manure ranged between one and two rupees per kg depending upon the place.
MARKETING IN MIGRATORY SHEEP FLOCKS IN SOUTHERN TAMIL NADU

## Table 1: Marketing of sheep

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>Small (n=40)</th>
<th>Medium (n=45)</th>
<th>Large (n=15)</th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>F-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Butcher + Middle man</td>
<td>3 (7.50)</td>
<td>3 (6.67)</td>
<td>1 (6.67)</td>
<td>7 (7.00)</td>
<td>0.00020NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle man</td>
<td>22 (55.50)</td>
<td>23 (53.33)</td>
<td>7 (46.67)</td>
<td>52 (52.00)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer + Middle man</td>
<td>13 (32.50)</td>
<td>16 (35.56)</td>
<td>6 (40.00)</td>
<td>35 (35.00)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butcher + middle man + farmer</td>
<td>2 (5.00)</td>
<td>3 (6.67)</td>
<td>1 (6.66)</td>
<td>6 (6.00)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>40 (100.00)</td>
<td>45 (100.00)</td>
<td>15 (100.00)</td>
<td>100 (100.00)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Price fixing basis

| Physical appearance         | 21 (52.50)   | 30 (66.67)    | 4 (26.67)    | 55 (55.00)| 0.00735NS|
| Sex + Physical appearance   | 6 (15.00)    | 2 (4.44)      | 2 (13.33)    | 10 (10.00)|         |
| Age + Sex + Physical appearance | 13 (32.50) | 3 (6.67)    | 9 (60.00)    | 25 (25.00)|         |
| **Total**                   | 40 (100.00)  | 45 (100.00)   | 15 (100.00)  | 100 (100.00)|         |

### Average sheep units sold/flock/year

- 52.55
- 93.40
- 207.80
- 94.64

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whereas in large-sized flocks, age, sex along with physical appearance (60 per cent) was considered for pricing. Ram lambs fetched a higher price than ewe lambs. Similar observations were made in sheep marketing\(^4,6\). But in none of the reports including the present study, the sale price was fixed based on the body weight of the animal. Knowledge on the spot weighing procedure using portable weighing devices like spring balance, digital balance etc. and price fixation on the body weight basis must be imparted to the flock owner for getting better returns from the sale of sheep. Exploitation by middlemen can be avoided by formation and strengthening of sheep co-operative societies and farmers self help groups.

The ram and ewe lambs with good body conformation at age group of one to 3 months were sold for growing and fattening. Stocks at the age group of 6 to 9 months were in demand for meat purpose. The flock owners while selling lambs prefer to sell ram lambs and ewe lambs in pair. Normally the price is fixed for a pair but not for a single lamb. Usually, the concept behind this is to sell a male and a female lamb of different ages on average price that would otherwise be fetched by sale of a ram lamb alone. The peak market season for sale of lambs was reported to be from “Vaikasi” (mid-May to mid-April) up to the end of “Aavani” (mid-August to mid-September). Festivals like Bakrid, Ramzan, “Vaikasi” of village temples and Diwali usually fall during these months when the demand for mutton is high. The practice of conducting “Moi virunthu” (community feast) which is very popular in the districts of Pudukkottai and Sivagangai also will be conducted during these months. Serving mutton dishes is the specialty of these community feasts.

Migratory sheep farm owners never take their marketable stock to weekly shandies (weekly markets). Only the buyer comes to the sheep camping site for on spot purchase. The mode of transporting marketable stock after purchase by the buyers is presented in Table-2. Tempos (84 per cent), van/mini lorries and motor cycle (16 per cent) were the mode of transporting sheep from sale point. Similar modes of transporting sheep and goats were reported\(^4,5,7\). The number of animals sold and the distance of the market influenced the mode of transport. Specially-designed tempos for transporting small ruminants were available in the study area.

### CONCLUSION

The middlemen played a major role in marketing of stock. Majority of the farmer reported that price for their sheep was fixed on the basis of physical appearance alone. The farmers must be educated on fixing price based on bodyweight of their stock. Usage of weighing scales like salter balance must be popularize to record body weight of sheep on the spot for sale. The farmers must be educated to improve awareness towards development programmes implemented by government. Formation of co-operative societies and self-help groups will avoid middlemen and fetch reasonable price for their stock.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The financial support and facilities provided by the Tamil Nadu...
Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Chennai, India is duly acknowledged. The authors are thankful to the Dean of Madras Veterinary College, Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Chennai-600 051, India for providing necessary facilities to carry out research work.

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