

A Comparison of Local and Jersey Crossbred Draught Oxen in the hills of East Nepal

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Four pairs of draught oxen (2 local and 2 Jersey crossbred) were studied when they ploughed bari land on local farms.

Work done, distance travelled and body temperature of each ox were measured continuously over a 5 h working day. A different team worked each day, completing at least 8 days work each.

Individual food intakes and digestibility of feed were measured when the animals were given rice straw and tree fodder, and housed and fed according to local husbandry practices.

The Jersey crossbreds, particularly the longer-legged type, had a higher rate of work than the local oxen in this study. They did significantly more work and covered a greater distance during the day.

The absence of a hump in the crossbred oxen had no effect on the position of the yoke or the way the oxen pulled when ploughing.

At first sight Jersey crossbreds would seem to be the oxen of choice in the hills; however, a number of factors have to be considered.

The longer-legged type of Jersey crossbred tended to work more erratically than any of the other teams. This did make them difficult to manoeuvre on small terraces, unlike the other teams which worked steadily throughout the day. A fast rate of work made the oxen more liable to heat stress. The crossbred oxen required more rest periods when ploughing than the local oxen. When fed according to local practices and given the same amount of feed as local oxen, Jersey crossbreds tended to do less well. During the ploughing months, the local oxen gained weight, while the crossbreds remained the same or lost some weight. Farmers often do not like the typical 'Jersey' appearance of some Jersey crossbreds, with cow hocks and prominent pin bones. The tall Jersey crossbreds can be difficult to pair up for work with other oxen as many of the local oxen available are shorter.

Although there are disadvantages to keeping Jersey crossbreds for work, their favourable work output suggests that the introduction of the Jersey crossbred in the hills is unlikely to be detrimental to the performance of the work oxen population.

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