

ABSTRACT

Smallholder dairy farmers aim to maximize the proportion of potentially high milk yielding dairy genotypes in their herds as a breeding strategy to increase milk production for home consumption and cash income. This study describes how farmers aiming at attaining increased milk yield practice animal identification and recording; source breeding stock; determine animal performance and the usefulness of such information; and preferences that farmers express for specific traits when choosing a sire or a dam for mating. Data on these parameters was obtained through a stratified random sampling survey in milk deficit and milk surplus regions. Data were analysed using descriptive, non-parametric test statistics and logistic regression modelling. Cattle identification was predominantly by naming and rarely by ear tagging, while cattle recording was predominantly on production and breeding history of the stock. Farmers obtained their replacement stock from farm reared cattle and from fellow farmers. Breeding sires came from own reared bulls and fellow farmers while artificial insemination (AI) was rarely used. Cattle information was mainly obtained from fellow farmers and farmers were more interested in knowing about the breed, breeder and performance history of dams or sires of dairy cattle than the progeny history. The traits of highest preference when selecting dams were milk yield and fertility while sires were chosen depending on their fertility and body conformation and milk yield of their progeny. Extension services and dairy development interventions should emphasize the contribution of cattle records in informing breeding decisions. To increase the uptake of AI will require innovation in service delivery including involving various farmer groups such as the dairy hubs and cooperative movements. There are business opportunities to repackage artificial insemination service delivery systems to satisfy the unmet demand for replacement heifers.

KEYWORDS:

Dairy

cattle selection

breeding strategy

performance recording

smallholders