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NAVIGATING THE CLIMATE CRISIS: IMPACTS AND ADAPTATIONS FOR FOODS OF ANIMAL ORIGIN

Koushik Kakoty[1]*, Siddhartha Shankar Pathak[1], Gautam Bordoloi[1] and Monosri Johari[2]

[1] Lakhimpur College of Veterinary Science, Assam Veterinary and Fishery University, Joyhing-787051, North Lakhimpur, Assam, India.

[2] College of Veterinary Science, Assam Veterinary and Fishery University, Khanapara-781022, Guwahati, India.

INTRODUCTION

Global food security amid changing climate conditions presents a significant challenge, particularly concerning foods of animal origin. Keeping livestock, vital for nutrition and economics, faces vulnerability due to rising temperatures, changed precipitation patterns, and shifted disease dynamics. This article investigates the impacts of climate change on livestock production and the urgent need for adaptation strategies as a form of intervention against such multi-faceted impacts.

IMPACTS ON ANIMAL HEALTH AND PRODUCTIVITY

Heat Stress and Livestock Performance

Climate change has one of the most direct impacts on rising global temperatures, leading to heat stress in livestock. It impairs the health and productivity of the animals. Heat stress lowers feed consumption, while growth rates are retarded, and reproductive performance is impaired. High temperatures reduce milk production in dairy cattle due to metabolic and hormonal disturbances (St-Pierre et al., 2003). Prolonged cases further reduce their productivity, affecting animal welfare and resulting in huge economic losses among the farmers.

Water Scarcity and Its Implications

Water is a fundamental necessity for animals and in the production of animal feed. Climate change intensifies water scarcity through alterations in rainfall patterns and an increased frequency of drought conditions (Thornton et al., 2009). The effects of water scarcity are particularly concerning in regions viz, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, that typically have low water resources. Animals will experience greater stress and a weakened immune system and consequently, exhibit lower productivity and are more susceptible to diseases due to reduced water availability (Nardone et al., 2010).

Disease Patterns and Distribution

Climate change is also altering the distribution and prevalence of livestock diseases, particularly those transmitted by vectors like insects. Warmer temperatures and changing humidity levels are expanding the range of vector-borne diseases, such as bluetongue and Rift Valley fever, into new regions (Purse et al., 2005). These diseases pose significant challenges for animal health management, requiring enhanced surveillance, vaccination, and biosecurity measures to protect livestock populations (Gale et al., 2009).

IMPACT ON FEED AND FORAGE AVAILABILITY

Climate Effects on Feed Crop Production

The production of key feed crops, such as maize and soybean, is highly sensitive to climatic conditions. Extreme weather events, including droughts and floods, can lead to reduced crop yields and increased variability in feed supply (Lobell et al., 2008). This, in turn, raises the cost of livestock production and forces farmers to rely on lower-quality feed alternatives, which can negatively impact animal health and productivity.

Degradation of Forage Quality

Forage quality is crucial for the health and productivity of grazing animals, such as cattle and sheep. Climate change is leading to the degradation of pasturelands through processes such as desertification, soil erosion, and changes in

vegetation composition (Soussana et al., 2010). Reduced forage quality can result in lower milk yields, slower growth rates, and increased susceptibility to diseases, further exacerbating the challenges faced by livestock farmers.

FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY

Mycotoxin Contamination

Climate change is influencing the prevalence of mycotoxins—hazardous compounds produced by fungi that contaminate feed crops. Warmer temperatures and increased humidity create favorable conditions for the growth of mycotoxin-producing fungi, leading to higher levels of contamination in feed and, subsequently, in animal products (Paterson & Lima, 2010). Mycotoxins, such as aflatoxins, pose serious health risks to both animals and humans, necessitating stricter monitoring and control measures in the food supply chain.

Pathogen Proliferation and Foodborne Illnesses

Higher temperatures and humidity levels associated with climate change can enhance the growth of foodborne pathogens, such as Salmonella and Campylobacter, in animal products. This increased pathogen load raises the risk of foodborne illnesses, posing a significant public health concern (Tirado et al., 2010). Addressing this issue requires improved food safety protocols, better surveillance systems, and the development of new technologies to detect and control pathogens in the food supply.

ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Rising Costs of Livestock Production

The combined effects of heat stress, water scarcity, and disease outbreaks are driving up the costs of livestock production. Farmers must invest in cooling systems, improved water management, and enhanced biosecurity measures to mitigate these impacts, all of which contribute to higher production costs (Nardone et al., 2010). These increased costs are often passed on to consumers, leading to higher prices for animal products such as milk, meat, and eggs.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Environmental Sustainability

Livestock production is a significant source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, particularly methane, which contributes to global warming. Climate change can exacerbate these emissions by increasing the metabolic rates of animals and altering the microbial activity in soils and manure (Gerber et al., 2013). Reducing livestock-related GHG emissions is crucial for mitigating climate change, and this can be achieved through practices such as improved feed efficiency, better manure management, and the adoption of climate-smart agriculture techniques (Herrero et al., 2016).

ADAPTATION STRATEGIES AND REGIONAL DISPARITIES

Vulnerability of Developing Regions

Developing regions, particularly in Africa and South Asia, are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change on livestock production due to limited access to resources and adaptive technologies. These regions face greater challenges in managing water scarcity, disease outbreaks, and market instability, which can exacerbate poverty and food insecurity (Thornton et al., 2009). International cooperation and knowledge-sharing are essential to help these regions build resilience and adapt to the changing climate.

Innovative Adaptation Strategies

Adapting to the impacts of climate change requires innovative strategies, such as breeding heat-resistant livestock, investing in climate-smart agriculture, and developing early warning systems for disease outbreaks. These strategies can help mitigate the effects of climate change on livestock production and ensure the sustainability of this sector (FAO, 2015). Additionally, integrating livestock production with other agricultural practices, such as agroforestry and rotational grazing, can enhance resilience and reduce environmental impacts (Herrero et al., 2017).

CONCLUSION

Climate change presents significant challenges to the production, safety, and availability of foods of animal origin. The impacts on animal health, productivity, feed availability, and food safety are complex and multifaceted, requiring a coordinated effort to develop and implement effective adaptation strategies. By investing in innovation and fostering international collaboration, the livestock sector can better navigate the climate crisis and ensure the

continued availability of safe and nutritious animal products for future generations.

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Corresponding E-mail:
koushikkakoty43@gamil.com