

Tribal women corner the market on India's heat-hardy black goats

Author - K. Rajendran , Published on - 16.2.2017

Editorial Comment: The ecological aspects such as conservation have not been mentioned. Cutting out the middleman has helped rural people survive as they face worsening heat and drought as a result of climate change



An Attapadi black goat is

loaded into a trailer after sale at the "goat village" in Agali, southern India. TRF/K. Rajendran AGALI, India, Feb 16 (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - The lean black goats owned by the tribal people of Attapadi, in India's Western Ghats, are known for their resilience. Not only are they resistant to most of the diseases that sicken other goats, they have a unique ability to prosper in southern India's increasingly severe heat, researchers say. "Black goats can withstand even scorching heat without much care and attention," said T. Giggan, a professor of agriculture at Kerala Agricultural University. That reputation for hardiness has not been lost on the region's livestock dealers, who in recent years have trekked into the foothills to buy the goats inexpensively from struggling tribal families and then sell them on, at much higher prices, in livestock markets. Now, however, tribal communities have come together to cut out the middlemen and keep more income at home by establishing just one "goat village" where all the region's tribal people sell their animals at a fixed price to visiting buyers. The change has helped shore up tribal families amid scorching heat that in recent years has dried up many streams in the region's hamlets and forced an increasing number of families to sell livestock or migrate to cities in Kerala and Tamil Nadu in search of work. "This coming summer I have a strong weapon (against drought) – our indigenous Attapadi black goat," said Ponnamma Thaghachan, a 38-year-old farmer in the village of Kullappadi.



An Attapadi black goat is loaded into a trailer after sale at the "goat village" in Agali, southern India. TRF/K. Rajendran

PAYING MORE In previous years, Vijayan Nair, a livestock trader from Kozhikode, said he was able to purchase black goats from villages in Attapadi for 1,000 rupees (\$15) each, as drought-hit families sold off stock in search of cash. "Due to the early advent of the drought, almost all the other goat breeds across Kerala are tired," he said. "But demand for the tough Attapadi goats has been hugely raised." His most recent visit, however, which aimed at taking home a dozen black goats for resale, wasn't quite so profitable. In Agali, where local people now bring their goats for sale, the animals sell for a minimum of 280 rupees (\$4) per kilo, or more than 5,000 rupees (\$75) for a typical animal. "I sold my 20-kilo goat for 5,600 rupees (\$84), and the money was immediately credited to my bank account," said Sundhari, a tribal woman who is among those raising the hardy goats. "Now I am sorry that last summer I sold three goats, much bigger than this one, for just 1,000 rupees each," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. The goat-selling cooperative, created by a coalition of women's self-help groups with the assistance of the National Livestock Mission, serves 192 tribal villages, its backers said. "Now no middlemen can loot the tribes. People can sell Attapadi goats only through the goat village and buyers can purchase them only through us," said Seema Bhaskar, who coordinates the project for the National Livestock Mission.



Women gather at the "goat village" in Agali, in southern India. TRF/K. Rajendran

Even at the higher prices, demand for the goats remains relatively strong, with 28 goats sold over one recent week in January. "Every day we are getting inquiries from farmers across the state. They want the genuine breed," Bhaskar said. Centralising sales could also help buyers, who sometimes inadvertently buy animals that are not Attapadi black goats, she said. Joseph Kurian, a livestock farmer from Kottayam who visited the village recently, said he two years ago bought a goat that was sold as an Attapadi – but became aware he had been cheated when it fainted in the heat. He said he was willing to pay a fair price – "but I should get the genuine breed," he said. With summer temperatures continuing to rise in the region, Attapadi goat breeders say they're aware they may soon have competition from some of their buyers, who intend to begin breeding the handsome animals themselves. The women are now looking to other products the cooperative might sell. One women's group in the neighbouring village of Pudur has started offering traditional medicines from a central sales point, and another group, in Sholayur, is now selling organic food. First published by

[Thomson Reuters Foundation News](#)