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The Missing Half of the Milk Story: A Case for Fodder Security

 **THE HINDU**

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ECONOMY**GS3**

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

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GS3

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THE LIFT LINE

We celebrate the milk without asking what the cow eats. The health of the dairy economy is decided not in the dairy but in the fodder field.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

India's dairy success is one of the most cited achievements of independent India, yet the foundation on which it rests is quietly cracking. Behind the record milk output lies a livestock population that is chronically underfed, dependent on fodder supplies that shrink with every acre of grazing land lost and every erratic monsoon. For the aspirant, this is a lesson in looking past headline output figures to the input constraints that determine whether a success can be sustained.

GS Paper 3: This is core to the economy syllabus, specifically agriculture, animal husbandry, food processing and the incomes of small and marginal farmers. It connects to rural livelihoods, the cooperative model, and the **resilience** of the farm economy to climate shocks.

For **Prelims**, hold the specifics: India is the world's **largest producer of milk**, a position built on **Operation Flood** and the **White Revolution** led by **Verghese Kurien** and the **National Dairy Development Board (NDDB)**. The livestock sector is a major source of rural income and a shock-absorber for small and marginal farmers, for whom animals are living savings. India faces a chronic **deficit in green fodder, dry fodder and feed concentrates**, worsened by shrinking grazing land and monsoon variability. Key schemes include the **National Livestock Mission** and the **Rashtriya Gokul Mission** for indigenous cattle development.

For **Mains**, the demand is to argue why a dedicated fodder-security intervention is justified, and to design its components in a way that is feasible and **equitable**.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The **White Revolution** transformed India from a milk-deficit nation into the world's largest producer, and the dairy cooperative model gave millions of small farmers a steady, if modest, cash flow. Milk is now among the most valuable outputs of Indian agriculture, and the livestock sector as a whole contributes a significant and rising share of agricultural gross value added. Crucially, animal husbandry is more equitably distributed than land: the landless and marginal own a large share of livestock, so livestock income narrows rural inequality.

That very success has quietly raised the demand for feed beyond what the country produces. Fodder does not command the policy attention that food grains do. There is no minimum support price for fodder, little dedicated cropland, and shrinking common grazing land as villages lose pasture to cultivation and construction. The result is a persistent gap between what animals need and what is available, a gap that widens sharply in drought years when even the standing crop fails.

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

A chronic, structural deficit

India's fodder shortage is not an occasional emergency but a standing structural condition. The country runs a deficit across all three categories of feed, and the shortfall is met by underfeeding animals, which lowers their productivity and health. Underfed animals give less milk and are more vulnerable to disease, so the deficit silently caps the returns of the entire dairy economy.

The squeeze from land and climate

PRESSURE	EFFECT ON FODDER
Shrinking common grazing land	Less free grazing, higher feed cost for the poor
Cultivated land prioritised for food and cash crops	Little acreage for dedicated fodder crops
Monsoon variability and drought	Sudden collapse of green and dry fodder supply
Low-yielding traditional fodder varieties	Persistent gap between demand and output

Each pressure compounds the others. When drought strikes, distress sales of cattle follow, wiping out the savings that livestock represent for the poorest households.

The equity dimension

Because livestock ownership is skewed toward the landless and marginal, a fodder crisis hits the most vulnerable hardest. A well who can afford bought feed weathers a drought; a marginal household forced to sell its animals loses both income and its cushion against future shocks. Fodder security is therefore not only an agricultural question but a question of rural resilience and equity.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Frame the milk economy as a chain: **feed leads to animal health, which leads to milk yield, which leads to farm income, which leads to rural welfare**. Policy has invested heavily in the downstream links, in procurement, processing and cooperatives, while neglecting the first link. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and feed is the weakest.

The corrective frame is to treat fodder as strategic infrastructure for the livestock economy, deserving the same seriousness as seed, irrigation and credit for crops. Judge any proposal by whether it strengthens the first link of the chain in both normal and drought years, and whether it reaches the marginal owner who needs it most.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Shrinking grazing land plus monsoon variability -> green, dry and feed deficit -> underfed livestock -> lower milk yield and animal health -> distress sales in drought years -> falling rural income -> case for a National Fodder Security Mission

WAY FORWARD

- ❶ **Launch a dedicated fodder-security mission.** Create a focused programme with clear targets for green and dry fodder output, distinct from broader livestock schemes, so fodder gets its own budget and accountability.
- ❷ **Promote high-yield fodder seed and dual-purpose crops.** Distribute improved fodder varieties, encourage dual-purpose grain-and-fodder cultivation, and bring fodder into the seed-supply and extension system.
- ❸ **Build fodder banks and a drought contingency plan.** Establish local fodder banks, silage and hay reserves, and a rapid-response mechanism to move fodder into drought-hit districts before distress sales begin.
- ❹ **Restore and manage common grazing land.** Protect and regenerate village pastures and degraded commons through community management, easing the burden on the landless who depend on free grazing.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC has repeatedly examined the White Revolution, the cooperative model and the economics of animal husbandry. A 2019 GS3 question asked about the role of livestock in the rural economy, and questions on Operation Flood and dairy cooperatives recur. Fodder security is the input-side angle on this well-worn theme.

Practice question: “India’s leadership in milk production is built on a fragile fodder base.” Examine the case for a dedicated national fodder-security mission and outline its key components. (15 marks, 250 words)

Sources: The Hindu Editorial, Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying

Source: The Missing Half of the Milk Story: A Case for Fodder Security — Ujjiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

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