

# Feed Assessment Tool (FEAST) focus group discussion guide



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*Patron: Professor Peter C Doherty AC, FAA, FRS  
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## Introduction

As of 2014, approximately 500 million smallholder farmers (i.e. farmers with one hectare or less of cultivated land) provide food for over two billion people worldwide. Feed for livestock is often cited as the main constraint to improved productivity for smallholder farms. Overcoming this constraint often seems an elusive goal as intervention programs tend to adopt a scattergun or trial-and-error approach which often fails to adequately diagnose the nature of the feed problem and therefore the means to deal with it.

The farmer-centred diagnosis methodology provides a means to systematically and rapidly assess feed resources at site level with a view to developing a site-specific strategy for improving feed supply and utilization through technical or organizational interventions.

Part of the farmer-centred diagnosis approach involves using the Feed Assessment Tool (FEAST), a set of forms and spreadsheets to help collect and analyze data related to local conditions and agricultural practices.

## Components of the FEAST Tool

- Focus group discussion guide (this document)
- Individual farmer interview questionnaire
- FEAST data application
- FEAST data application manual

More information: <https://www.ilri.org/feast>

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## Steps in a farmer-centred diagnosis

1. **Preliminary scoping exercise:** the FEAST facilitator visits the site to collect information, secure approval from local officials, recruit a team to help manage the process, identify demographically representative groups of farmers to participate in focus group discussions and select a meeting point for the focus groups.
2. **Focus group discussions:** the FEAST facilitator schedules meetings with groups of 12–16 farmers for the purpose of collecting their input regarding local conditions, problems and potential solutions related to livestock feed resources. Using the focus group discussion guide, the facilitator leads the farmers in a conversation and helps find consensus.
3. **Individual farmer interviews:** from each focus group, nine farmers are selected to participate in one-on-one interviews to collect additional data using the individual interview questionnaire. There should be three small, three medium and three large farmers. However, those categories are defined during the focus group.
4. **Follow up research:** the FEAST facilitator conducts additional research on site to verify/ground-truth the data collected in the focus group discussions and individual farmer interviews.
5. **Data entry and analysis:** data collected during the focus group discussions and individual interviews is entered into the FEAST data application, in order to generate reports and graphs to inform the development of intervention strategies.
6. **Preparation of farmer-centred diagnosis report:** the FEAST facilitator drafts a report presenting findings of research and recommendations for livestock feed intervention strategies, with supporting evidence from the FEAST data application and other data collected during the farmer-centred diagnosis.
7. **Implementation of livestock feed intervention strategies:** recommended livestock feed interventions are prioritized based on feasibility and impact. An action plan/roadmap is drafted and presented to the community. After implementation of the intervention, results are evaluated and the plan refined on a periodic basis.

## Focus group discussion: overview

The objective of the focus group discussion is to get the consensus opinion of the participants on the following topics:

1. **General farming system description:** gather information on local farm sizes, household sizes, labour availability, rainfall patterns, irrigation, cropping seasons and types of animals.
2. **Management of livestock species:** identify the main purpose of livestock in the farming system and explore how farmers feed and manage livestock.
3. **Problems, issues and opportunities within the livestock system:** what do farmers view as the major problems related to livestock feed, production, etc. and what do they see as potential solutions?
4. **Distribution of wealth/land:** define categories of farmers by land holdings and select three farmers from each category (large, medium and small) for individual farmer interviews.

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## Facilitating a FEAST focus group discussion

A focus group discussion is when a diverse group of people (in this case, local farmers) are brought in to share their knowledge, thoughts and opinions about a specific topic. For a Farmer-Centred Diagnosis using the FEAST tool, the recommended focus group size is 12–16 people, as smaller groups can be dominated by one or two individuals while larger groups make it difficult for everyone to contribute.

The job of the facilitator is to let the participants lead the discussion, while keeping conversation focused on the topic at hand, making sure all major topics of concern are addressed and enforcing the ground rules.

Guidelines for successfully facilitating a FEAST focus group discussion include:

1. **Study the materials in advance** to ensure that you are familiar with the discussion guide and the data that needs to be collected for later analysis.
2. **Reconfirm the availability of the meeting site** and make sure all invited farmers know the time and place of the meeting. Double-check that any necessary audiovisual equipment is still available and functioning, even if you checked it before. Allow extra time at the beginning to observe local social customs and give people time to arrive and settle in.
3. **Assign roles to members of the FEAST technical team.** There should be at least one lead facilitator to guide the discussion, one or more note takers, a time keeper and someone to operate the audiovisual equipment if used (some of these roles can be combined, but there should be at least one full-time facilitator and one full-time note taker).
4. **Arrive as early as possible** to the meeting site to prepare before the scheduled start time.
5. **Make introductions** including farmers and visitors/team members.
6. **Explain the purpose of the meeting**, i.e. to gather information about agriculture and livestock conditions in the area, identify problems and propose actions.
7. **Explain the process.** The facilitator will ask an initial question to start a conversation, then the farmers will discuss and try to reach consensus. When consensus is required but cannot be reached, a vote may be taken.
8. **Summarize the timetable**, i.e. that the meeting will last roughly three hours and nine farmers will be asked to stay an extra hour for individual interviews.
9. **Outline the ground rules**, particularly that participants must respect each other's views even if they don't agree and not interrupt when it is someone else's turn to speak.
10. **Ask open-ended questions** to get conversation started then follow up with probing questions when clarification is required.
11. **Keep the meeting on topic** to make sure all major points in the focus group discussion guide are covered.
12. **Help resolve conflicts**, should any arise, by remaining calm, asking questions and insisting that participants respect each other and the ground rules.

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## General information

Fill this out in advance as much as possible.

Name of site/village:

Name of sub district:

Name of district:

Country:

Number of households in the area:

*To be considered a household, the dwelling must have a kitchen.*

GPS coordinates of meeting location<sup>1</sup>:

Latitude:  Longitude:

It is the facilitator's responsibility, not the participants', to determine GPS coordinates (if possible).

Number of participants present:

Male:  Female:

Date:

Start time:  End time:

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<sup>1</sup>Record GPS co-ordinates in degrees, minutes and seconds i.e. +/- ddd, mm, ss



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## I. General farming system description [60 minutes]

**Objective:** obtain a general picture of the farming and livestock system

### I.1. Roughly how many households are in the community/village?

Number of households

### I.2. What is the typical (or average) household size? On average, how many people have been living continuously in each household for the past six months?

- Elicit responses from farmers and allow farmers to debate the responses and reach a final consensus.
- Where consensus is difficult to reach, taking individual household size of farmers present may help give an indication of household size in the village

people per household

What percentage (%) of household members are migrating out of the village for one reason or the other?

%

Record these reasons.

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I.3. What is the typical farm size? What is the minimum, maximum and average cultivated land per household?

- “Farm size” is considered to be cultivated land
- Also consider additional lands that may be leased or shared.
- Elicit responses from farmers and allow farmers to debate the responses and reach a final consensus.
- Where consensus is difficult to reach, taking individual land sizes of farmers present may give an indication of land sizes in the village

Minimum:  Acres | Hectares | Local Units (circle one)

Average:  Acres | Hectares | Local Units (circle one)

Maximum:  Acres | Hectares | Local Units (circle one)

If local units, name of local unit:

One hectare =  Local units

What are the common land tenure systems in the village?

Is the land tenure system a constraint to livestock and fodder production? If so how?



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#### I.4. Distribution of land/wealth [30 minutes]

**Objective:** determine the ranges for small, medium and large farms in order to select participants from each category for individual interviews.

I.4.1. How much land would be considered a 'small' farm (below average land size)? Medium (average land size)? Large (above average land size)?

What % of local households would fall into each of these categories?

- Ranges/cut-off points between categories should be determined by the farmers.
- Use the average farm size as determined in section I.1 as a starting point.
- For the purposes of this section, only consider cultivated land
- Make sure ranges are contiguous e.g. 0–1, 1–3, >3

Category	Range of land size	% of households that fall in category
Landless	0	
Small		
Medium		
Large		

I.5. On a scale of 0–5, where 0 = no rainfall and 5 = heavy rainfall, how does the rainfall pattern vary over a year?

- Help farmers relate to the rainfall scores by explaining the range of scores and giving examples e.g. number of days receiving rainfall in a month as an indicator of amount of rainfall.
- Initiate a discussion about rainfall distribution throughout the year. Allow farmers time to debate and arrive at a consensus.
- Note that there could be differences in rainfall pattern even within a village depending on geographical factors such as altitude (high and lowlands), proximity to water bodies, mountains etc. where these are obvious construct more than one rainfall pattern e.g. for low and highlands.
- Guiding questions could include:
  - During which months do you receive the most rainfall here?
  - During which month do you receive the lowest amount of rainfall?
  - What score would you give for the amount of rainfall in those months?

Follow on to prompt farmers for scores to all the months throughout the year.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall (0–5)												

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I.6. Name the cropping seasons that occur in this area. In which months do the various seasons occur (tick the appropriate boxes in the table below).

- Farmer will often relate cropping seasons to rainfall and dry seasons. With this in mind:
  - Ask farmers to name the cropping seasons as they are locally known.
  - Ask farmers to indicate which months these cropping seasons occur. Also indicate the dry season months even though cropping may not be occurring
- Farmers may make reference to the type of crops grown or activities that occur during these cropping seasons during their discussions. Please record these crops /activities and months during which they are grown/occur.

Name of season	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1.												
2.												
3.												

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I.7. Availability of water and irrigation

I.7.1. Is water for watering livestock available in the area?

What percentage (%) of households have access to water?

 %

For watering livestock?

What types of water sources are available in the area?

Source	Seasonality

What are the distances covered to access water for drinking and watering livestock?

Distance	Seasonality

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I.7.2. Is irrigation available in the area?

What percentage (%) of households have access to irrigation?

 %

What types of irrigation are available in the area?

What crops mainly benefit from irrigation?

On a scale of 0–4; where 0 = low and 4 = high, how would you score the availability of water for livestock (including fodder production)?

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I.8. When is labour most required?

How much does it typically cost to hire daily paid labour by gender and activity (e.g. ploughing, seeding, weeding, harvesting, etc.)?

Activity	Males	Females

How much does the cost of labour vary throughout the year?

Maximum:

Minimum:

Are labour costs affordable for most households?

Are many people leaving the farm to work in the city/town or seek education?

On a scale of 0–4; where 0 = difficult and 4 = easy, how easy is it to hire casual labour as and when required?

- I.9. What livestock are raised within the area? What are the animals mainly used for?  
(Complete the table only for livestock species that are relevant to the survey area)

Livestock species	Primary use (eg. production of milk for sale, production of milk for household consumption, meat production, draught, manure production etc.)	% of households that own species	Average number of animals per household
Local dairy cows			
Improved dairy cows			
Local dairy buffalo			
Improved dairy buffalo			
Draught cattle			
Draught buffalo			
Fattening cattle			
Sheep			
Goats			
Pigs			
Poultry – village			
Poultry – commercial			
Camels			
Horse			
Donkeys			

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I.10. What are the main sources and types of credit for livestock/cropping activities?

Source	Seasonality

What are the shares (%) of formal/informal credit?

Formal:  % Informal:  %

What are the conditions for obtaining cash/credit for crop/livestock production?

What percentage (%) of local farmers have access to credit?  %

What percentage (%) of focus group participants aspired to access credit in the last two years?

%

On a scale of 0–4; where 0 = difficult and 4 = easy, how easy is it to access credit when required?



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I.I.I. Is land area available for cultivation increasing or decreasing, and why?

Is land used for more than one crop per year?

If fallowing is practiced, how much land is cultivated vs. how much is put to fallow? (enter N/A if fallowing is not practiced)

Cultivated:  % Fallow:  %

This is the amount of uncultivated land.

What is the reason for land being left fallow? Is the land being put to fallow increasing or decreasing, and why?

What is the cost to lease one ha or local unit of land?

If local units, name of unit:

One hectare =  Local Units

For the average household, what % of land is used for fodder vs. subsistence (staple cereals) vs. cash crops?

Fodder:  % Subsistence:  % Cash Crops:  %

In case of extensive systems, is there enough land for supplying forage?

Is land for cultivation in short supply? On a scale of 0–4; where 0 = low and 4 = high, what is the availability of land for fodder cultivation?

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I.12. What is the distance/travel time to the local market?

What is the cost of travel to the local market?

Are roads accessible throughout the year? Are there certain times of year or weather conditions when the roads are not accessible?

Who are the main suppliers of inputs in the area?

Supplier	Input type

On a scale of 0–4, where 0 = never available and 4 = always available, how available are crop and farm inputs in the local markets when required?

- 'Inputs' include items such as fertilizer, farm implements (hoe, sickle, plough etc.), seeds, feeds, animal health drugs, acaricides, water pumps/pipes, plastic sheeting, irrigation equipment etc.

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## 2. Management of livestock species [60 minutes]

**Objective:** assess how livestock are managed within the area

### 2.1. Housing and feeding of livestock

How are livestock housed?

Types of structures used	
Feeding troughs provided?	
Bedding provided?	
Housed throughout the day or partially?	
Are animals housed together or separated (by age, species, sex or type)?	

What is the style of feeding (stall fed, tethered, open grazing or combination)?

If grazing, which areas are utilized?

Are there seasonal differences in style of feeding?

Are there differences in style of feeding by animal type?

What percentage (%) of farmers process feed for livestock in the area?

- Feed processing includes chopping, urea treatment, mixing etc.

 %

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What types of feed are processed?

Do farmers mix homemade rations from processed feeds?

Of the farmers who process feed, what percentage are male vs. female?

Male:

%

Female:

%

What percentage (%) of farmers offer concentrate feeds to their animals?

%

Is there any other seasonal variation in management methods?

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## 2.2. Veterinary/animal health services

What are some common types of health problems in the area that warrant veterinary attention?

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What are the types of services available and who provides them?

Service	Provider(s)	Average distance	Average price

How common are traditional veterinary practices?

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### 2.3. Livestock reproduction methods

What type of livestock reproduction services are available (artificial insemination and/or bull service)?

What percentage (%) of local farmers use each type of service?

Artificial insemination:  %      Bull:  %

For artificial insemination (AI) services:

AI provider(s)	Availability (0–5, 0 = difficult, 5 = easily available)	Average price (semen and transportation)	Rate of repeat service

For bull service:

Provider(s)	Type(s) of bulls used (local vs. improved breeds)	Availability (0–5, 0 = difficult, 5 = easily available)	Average price

Are there any other problems/issues associated with bull services?

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### 3. Core feed issues

**Objective:** identify the relative importance of core feed issues

**Exercise:** Think through the main difficulties faced in supply of feed and score the following five categories (0 = no problem, 4 = severe problem)

Issue	Score (0–4)
<b>Seasonality/dry or cool season feed scarcity.</b> Do farmers struggle to find enough feed for animals during the dry or cool season?	
<b>Seasonality/growing season feed scarcity.</b> Do farmers struggle to find enough feed for animals during the growing season e.g. because animals are confined to avoid damage to crops?	
<b>Overall feed availability.</b> Is there a general problem of feed scarcity throughout the year? Are animals routinely in poor condition?	
<b>Overall feed quality.</b> Is most of the available feed of low quality e.g. crop residues and poor quality collected feed? Is it difficult to source concentrate feeds and to grow planted forages?	



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#### 4. Problems, issues, opportunities within livestock system [30 minutes]

**Objective:** determine if farmers recognize feed as a major factor limiting animal production, and what farmers see as potential solutions.

- 4.1. List the major problems faced by farmers in the area with reference to livestock production. What do farmers view as the solution to these identified problems?

	Problem	Solution(s)
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

- 
- 4.2. Complete pair-wise comparisons for the problems in the table below. For each comparison, record which problem is identified as the more important of the two.

Pair	Problem considered more important
Problem 1 vs. Problem 2	
Problem 1 vs. Problem 3	
Problem 1 vs. Problem 4	
Problem 1 vs. Problem 5	
Problem 2 vs. Problem 3	
Problem 2 vs. Problem 4	
Problem 2 vs. Problem 5	
Problem 3 vs. Problem 4	
Problem 3 vs. Problem 5	
Problem 4 vs. Problem 5	

Rank problems based on number of times they were selected as more important in the pairwise comparisons (highest number = most important)

Problem	Number of times chosen as more important	Ranking (1 = most, 5 = least)
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

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## Selection of farmers for individual interviews

- Based on the table in section 4.1., select three (3) focus group participants from each category (small, medium and large).
- Try to select individuals whose land holdings would place them near the middle of their category.
- A total of nine (9) individuals should be selected for further interview.

Category	Names of farmers	Contact number
Small	1.	
	2.	
	3.	
Medium	1.	
	2.	
	3.	
Large	1.	
	2.	
	3.	

This is the end of the focus group discussion.

Thank the unselected farmers for their time.

Explain that the data will be analyzed to identify major issues and potential solutions related to livestock feed, and the findings and recommendations will be shared with the community once the study is complete.