
Buffalo breeding in The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

G. Bunevski

*Department of Animal Husbandry, Faculty of Agriculture,
Bul. Alexander Makedonski BB, 91000 Skopje,
The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*

Number of buffaloes in the past years in The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is as follows:

- a. 1939 – 15 600 buffaloes;
- b. 1949 – 30 700 heads;
- c. 1959 – 22 000 heads;
- d. 1969 – 13 400 heads;
- e. 1979 - 9 300 heads;
- f. 1989 - 1 600 heads;
- g. 1997 - 1 013 heads and the number is falling, buffaloes being replaced by cattle.
- h. Herd type: in most cases 10-50 buffaloes per herd.
- i. Bulls: one bull for approximately 10 cows.

Bulls are born mainly in the same herd. To date in The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia there has not been any breeding programme or planned mating.

Macedonian buffalo are black and have a height at withers of 129-131 cm, height at rump of 113 cm (111-146), body length 132-141 cm, chest depth 72.1 cm, chest girth 190 cm and they have a rectangular body frame.

AI is not practiced in buffaloes and the only way for mating is natural breeding without organization and selection. Most of the herds are settled in the less developed areas and near the rice areas or close to the rivers.

The system of keeping buffalo is as follows: there is a group of village people, each being assigned as a buffalo keeper on established days in the following month, the frequency of which depends on the number of his own buffaloes. At 6 a.m. every morning buffaloes, led by the chosen keeper, are taken to pasture around the village and move around until 5 p.m. Before going to pasture and after coming back home, they are hand milked only by their favourite milker.

After returning to the village, the keeper leads the herd to the centre of the village and from there each buffalo goes alone to his farmyard without a leader. From March to July they are repairing their body condition but from July to October in most of the lowlands the grass is dry and buffaloes often move up to the hill and mountain pastures together with sheep and cattle. From November to March they are kept in the village, tied and fed mainly with poor quality hay or straw without any concentrate.

The conditions on farms are very poor: buffaloes are tied to the ground, by rope, with no or little disinfecting of the udder and no milking equipment. Most of them are milked twice a day. The sheds are dark, with low ventilation (from the window) and without daily cleaning of the manure.

The breeding season starts in August and the delivering period is approximately in September. They are mated naturally, the female is taken to the buffalo bull by hand; the bull is kept separate from females.

There is no breeding station or progeny testing. No organized eartagging system or registration for buffaloes is in operation.

Milk production is the major purpose for rearing buffaloes.

- Milk yield in the lactation is near 600-800 kg milk with 7.5-9 percent of fat. The duration of the lactation is near to four to seven months, rarely nine months. Reproduction performances are good, each buffalo giving 10-12 calves per lifetime; longevity is often more than 20 years.
- The body weight of adult females is on average 505 kg, in adult males it is approximately 700-800 kg. The calves are born with a body weight of 32.6 kg (male) to 31.2 kg (female). Females are mated the first time at the age of 3½ years; 4 years for bulls.
- Meat production is not given a great deal of importance. Most of the male progeny is slaughtered at 5-10 months of age, after finishing or during the grazing period. The dressing percentage for all categories is near to 48-51 percent. Most buffalo meat from adult animals is used for processing.
- Milk is used mainly for processing; first it is skimmed, then processed into cheese or curd.
- Sometimes buffaloes are attacked by parasites and by leeches.