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What is the livestock census and why is it conducted?

Some 87,000 enumerators will collect data for the 21st livestock census between October 2024 and February 2025. Here is why the exercise matters

Written by Harikishan Sharma Follow

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A gaushala in Uttar Pradesh. (Wikimedia Commons)

Rajiv Ranjan Singh, the Union Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, on Thursday launched the 21st Livestock Census in New Delhi. Here is all you need to know.

What is the livestock census all about?

Conducted every five years, the census carries out a headcount of the number of domesticated animals, poultry, and stray animals in the country. The census takes into account information about the species, breed, age, sex, and ownership status of the animals in question.

Since 1919, a total of 20 livestock censuses have been carried out so far, with the last being conducted in 2019. The enumeration process for the 21st census will take place between October 2024 to February 2025.

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Over the next few months, some 87,000 enumerators will visit each and every independent house, apartment, and enterprise, as well as institutions such as gaushalas (cattle sheds), dairy farms, poultry farms, veterinary colleges, and defence establishments, to gather information about livestock in India. The census is expected to cover 30 crore households in India.

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Which animals will be counted in the 21st census?

According to the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, information on sixteen animal species will be collected in the 21st census. These include: cattle, buffalo, mithun, yak, sheep, goat, pig, camel, horse, ponies, mule, donkey, dog, rabbit, and elephant. In total, the census will capture information on 219 indigenous breeds of these sixteen species recognised by ICAR-National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources (NBAGR).

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Besides these, the census will also carry out a headcount of poultry birds such as fowl, chicken, duck, turkey, geese, quail, ostrich, and emu.

What is the objective of the livestock census?

The livestock sector plays an important role in providing employment to people in rural areas.

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In terms of productivity, especially in the agriculture sector, poultry and animal husbandry contributes to roughly 30% of the Gross Value Added (GVA). In the economy overall, the livestock sector's GVA stands at roughly 4.7%. For comparison, the whole agriculture sector contributes to a GVA of roughly 15%. GVA refers to the total output of a sector minus the cost of intermediate consumption.

Among other things, the data of the census will be used to estimate GVA from the livestock sector. It will also help formulate and implement policies relating to the census. "Livestock Census shapes policies, ensures sustainable growth of India's Livestock Sector," Union Minister Singh said while launching the census exercise.

The data from the census will also be crucial to track progress of achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. The Livestock Census will provide data pertaining to Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), and Target 2.5 (to maintain genetic diversity in food and nutrition), specifically Indicator 2.5.2 (The percentage of local livestock breeds that are at risk of extinction) of the SDGs.

How will the 21st livestock census be different from the previous exercises?

The census this time will be fully digitised, like the last one in 2019. This will include “online data collection through a mobile application, monitoring at various levels through a digital dashboard, capturing the latitude and longitude of data collection location, and generation of livestock census report through software.”

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The 21st census will capture several new data points. These include:

Data on pastoral animals, pastoralists: The census will, for the first time, collect data on the contribution of pastoralists to the livestock sector, their socio-economic status, and livestock holding.

More details, granular information: The census will find out the proportion of households whose major income comes from the livestock sector. It will also contain data on the gender of stray cattle.

What did the 2019 Livestock Census find?

535.78 million was the total livestock population of India. This included:

192.9 million cattle

148.88 million goats

109.85 million buffaloes

74.26 million sheep

9.06 million pigs

All other animals taken together contributed just 0.23% of the total livestock population in India.

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Harikishan Sharma

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Harikishan Sharma, Senior Assistant Editor at The Indian Express' National Bureau, specializes in reporting on governance, policy, and data. He covers the Prime Minister [... Read More](#)

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