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Hossein Barani

*Gorgan University of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, Iran*

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## Traditional grazing systems used by pastoralists of eastern Alborz (north of Iran)

H. Barani Assistant professor, Dept. Rangeland Management, Gorgan University of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, Gorgan, IRAN. E-mail: baranihossein@yahoo.com

**Key words :** pastoral communities, indigenous knowledge, grazing styles, indigenous management

**Introduction** Human being is an important component of rangeland ecosystems and rangeland management strategies depends on socio-cultural context. Understanding indigenous knowledge and traditional tactics and techniques are necessary to develop range management science and upgrade range exploitation ways especially in developing countries (Macleod, 1997). There are many traditional grazing systems among pastoralists of eastern Alborz who have a transhumant life style. In this paper I introduce some of them.

**Materials and methods** Study Area is the eastern part of Alborz Mt. chains elevated up to 3000 m from sea level with a sub-alpine environment and work as summer rangelands and the adjacent lowlands located in the south of this Mt. chain that elevated about 1000-1200 m from sea level with a semi-desert environment and work as winter rangelands. An ethnographic/participatory research (deep interviews and perform some affairs as an amateur shepherd among them) was undertaken in one-year cycle commenced in Sep 2000 and finished in Sep 2001. The data were recorded in 22 pocket-size notebooks and then key phrases transferred in about 5000 slips. Finally the slips categorized according to mind /concept mapping method.

**Results and discussion** There were many traditional grazing systems, tactics and techniques among the pastoralists of Alborz. These are the most important ones:

A) *Rugah-Rugah Charandan*: they divide imaginary pastoral Unit into 3-10 sub-units and one day pasturing per each sub-unit.  
B) *Lengeh-Lengeh Kardan*: The herders separate each herd into 2-4 bands (*Lengeh*) and graze units according to band's performance specially in summer rangelands. So the high quality units are allocated to the high performance bands.

C) *Shab-Charandan*: herders believe that night grazing is a good way to limit and reduce selecting power of grazers so that in night conducted routes, the grazing animals graze less palatable plants too.

D) *Now-Jar Dadan*: this way is applied in meadows or artificial pastures to exploit them gradually. The high quality pastures divided into 10-40 imaginary cells. The animals are moved to a non-grazed cell at the end of everyday so that they feed with fresh pasturage in all days of a grazing period.

E) *Henar Dadan*: in semi-desert or steppe regions there are few watering points in each pastoral unit. In some cases there are some good foraging possibilities but no watering point and no possibility to supply required water. In these conditions pastoralists habituate animals to drink every other day. So the pastoralists are able to move animals to drier parts of units and graze them in the days that they don't need to use water.

F) *Flexible regulation of grazing period with land relieves*: the sun-facing and low altitude slopes in northern hemisphere are warmer and have relatively an earlier spring and a late autumn in comparison to other slopes. So the plants have different phenology in different slopes. These pastoralists have flexible regulations to manage these variations. They graze south-facing and low altitude slopes earlier than other slopes.

G) *Flexible regulation of grazing period with phenology of poisonous plants*: the pastoralists are believed that *Verbascum* Spp. (*Sclophulariace*) are poisonous at flowering stage. Consequently they don't move herds to places encompassed this genus at their flowering period.

H) *Flexible regulation of grazing period with livestock's salt-craving*: the herders have a high attention to animals' salt-craving as a distinct driving force. So they consider some halophyte habitats to pasture them periodically in order to compensate their salt-craving.

I) *No change of pasture during bucking period*: the shepherds believed they shouldn't change pastoral unit or habitat during bucking period. They believed that changing the pasture or habitat in this phase may lead to unsuccessfulness in embryofarming. This rule should be respected in pasturing duration.

**Conclusion** There are many rules and experiences among pastoralists should be explored in academic researches and respected in expert-oriented planning cases.

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