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The livestock and forage balance policy in practice in China—evidence from Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region

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Key words : grassland management and policy, the livestock and forage balance policy, opportunistic strategy

Introduction The livestock and forage balance policy (LFB) was formally legislated by China Ministry of Agriculture in 2005. However, carrying capacity had little use in rangeland management in the new rangeland science. Herders should not adhere to a single conservative stocking rate (Campbell, et al., 2006). Herders continuously adjusted the number of their livestock according to climate and market, this was a business process, therefore, adjusting livestock by force through LFB was not an effective management activity (Yang, et al., 2005). What were the results of LFB in China? Evidence from Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMR) is introduced here.

Methods About 100 persons from more than 20 villages in IMR were interviewed face to face. More than 60 house holds and 12 officers were interviewed, and a questionnaire was used during those interviews.

Results In theory, LFB adopted a conservative strategy. One single carrying capacity for natural grassland was confirmed for each county (Sumu), those households whose livestock exceeded the official standard were warned the first time, and fined RMB 10-20 Yuan per excess sheep unit the next time. However, in practice LFB, when it was put into force, adopted a purely opportunistic strategy (Table 1). In IMR, LFB was put into force in the whole Xinlinguole Meng at the end of 2002, but in some other regions, LFB was not carried out strictly, or not executed at all. Although the regional single carrying capacity was announced in newspapers, regional managers adjusted the standards based on local facts, and adopted very flexible management during implementation, for examples in some villages, only exotic herders were fined strictly according to the standards; and it was a common practice to ignore the excessive livestock less than 30% above standard. Moreover, LFB played an important role in transforming the animal husbandry production style, for example, in Morigike village, milk cows increased from under 100 in 2004 to more than 300 in 2007, mainly because milk cows were not included in LFB, thus LFB is becoming more and more complex in dealing with the growing reaction of herders. In the area where grasslands were more common due to the imperfect land tenure in China grassland (Yang, et al., 2005), LFB was more welcomed, because LFB obviously restrained rich herders from owning too many livestock. Carrying capacity had many disadvantages in rangeland management, but in IMR, LFB was carried out so flexibly it made LFB like a magic stick. Just like magic results came from the enchanter, the achievements of LFB mainly depended on local managers' adaptive implementation.

Table 1 LFB in theory and in practice in IMR.

	Standards	Benefit for managers	Measures	Strategy
In theory : from the rules	Regional single stocking rates based on carrying capacity	No benefit	Admonition, amerce, and tax	conservation strategy
In practice : evidence from the interviewed persons	None herders exactly knew how to calculate the standards, but some of them believed the official standards reasonable.	All herders believed managers could seek rent, but also believed it was normal.	LFB was carried out so adaptive that outcomes from interviews were confusing.	opportunistic strategy

Conclusions In IMR, LFB adopted an opportunistic strategy, and was carried out variably in different regions, although it should be carried out in the same way. In some cases, LFB played an important role in grassland conservation, but the achievements mainly came from local managers' adaptive management.

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