Animal census of two Eastern Cape rural wards: preliminary results for cattle

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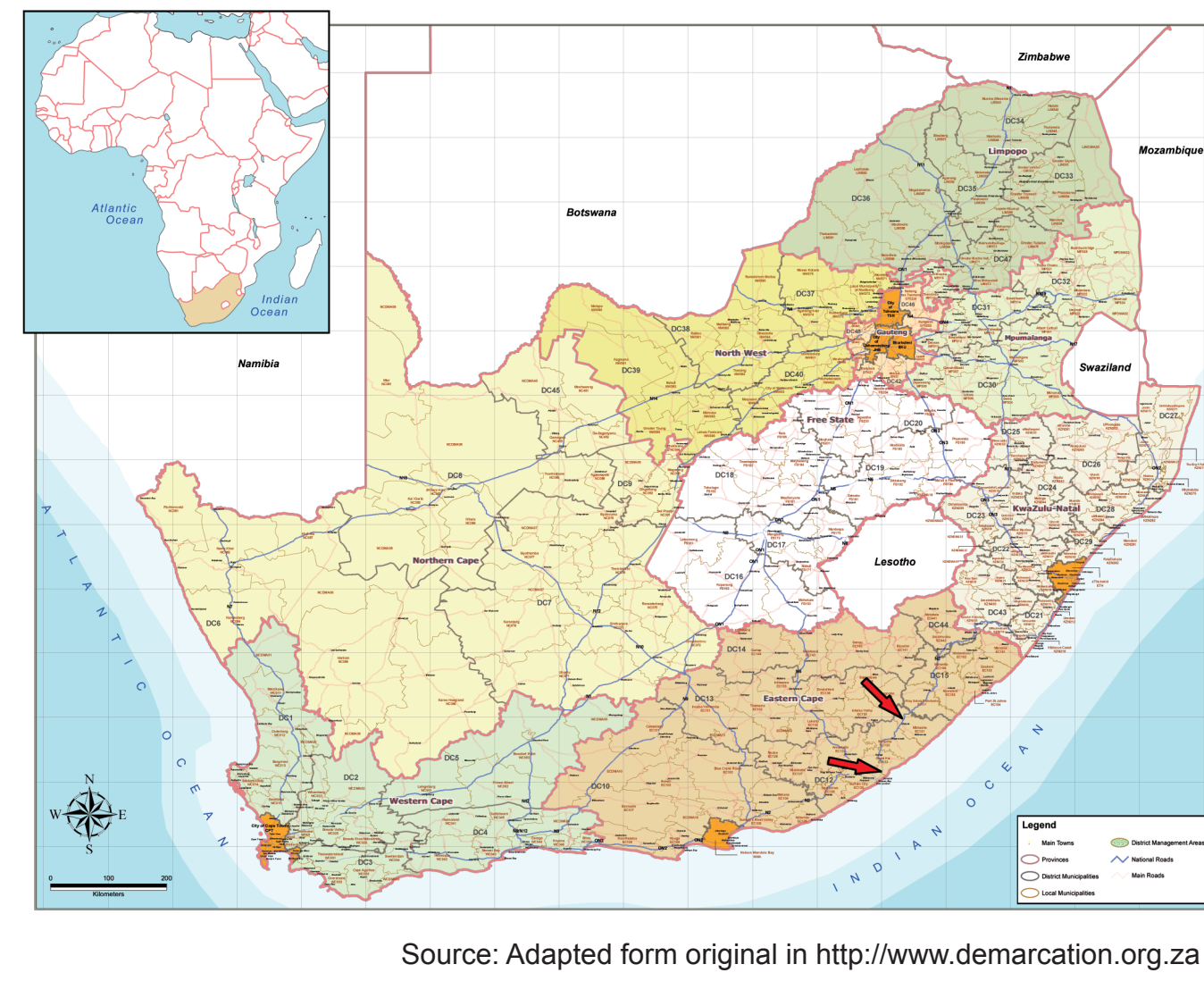
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Introduction

The Eastern Cape Animal Information System Amathole (ECAISA) is an animal census project in rural areas of the Amathole District Municipality in South Africa.

The objective is to generate key information on animal numbers and sanitary status for the Eastern Cape State Veterinary Services.
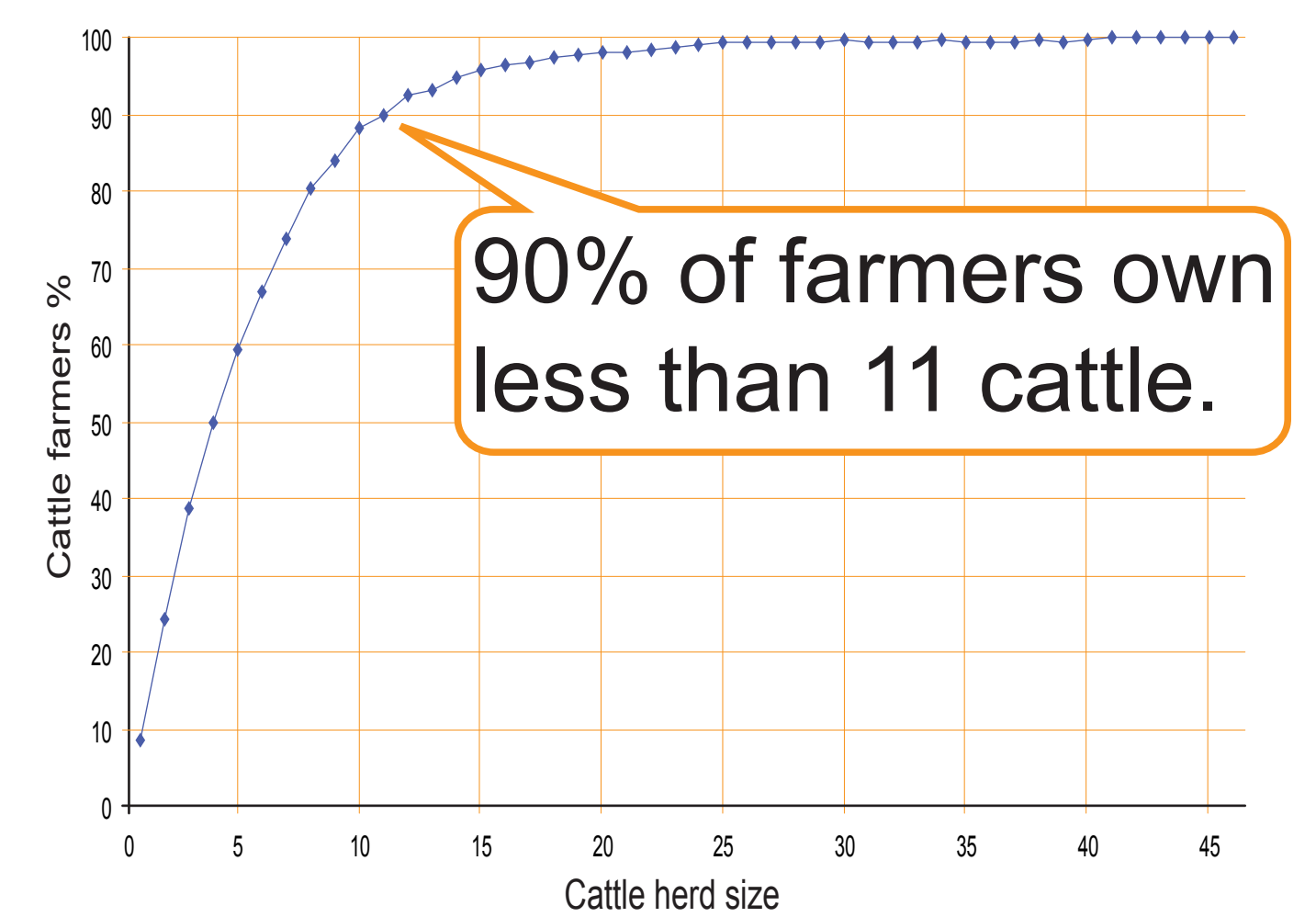
20 data collectors completed 2177 questionnaires in a two week field period. Partial cattle preliminary results with pooled data are presented here.

Source: Adapted form original in http://www.demarcation.org.za

Results: Herd Size

Farmers in rural areas were asked about the total number of cattle owned.

The most common herd size was of 2 animals.

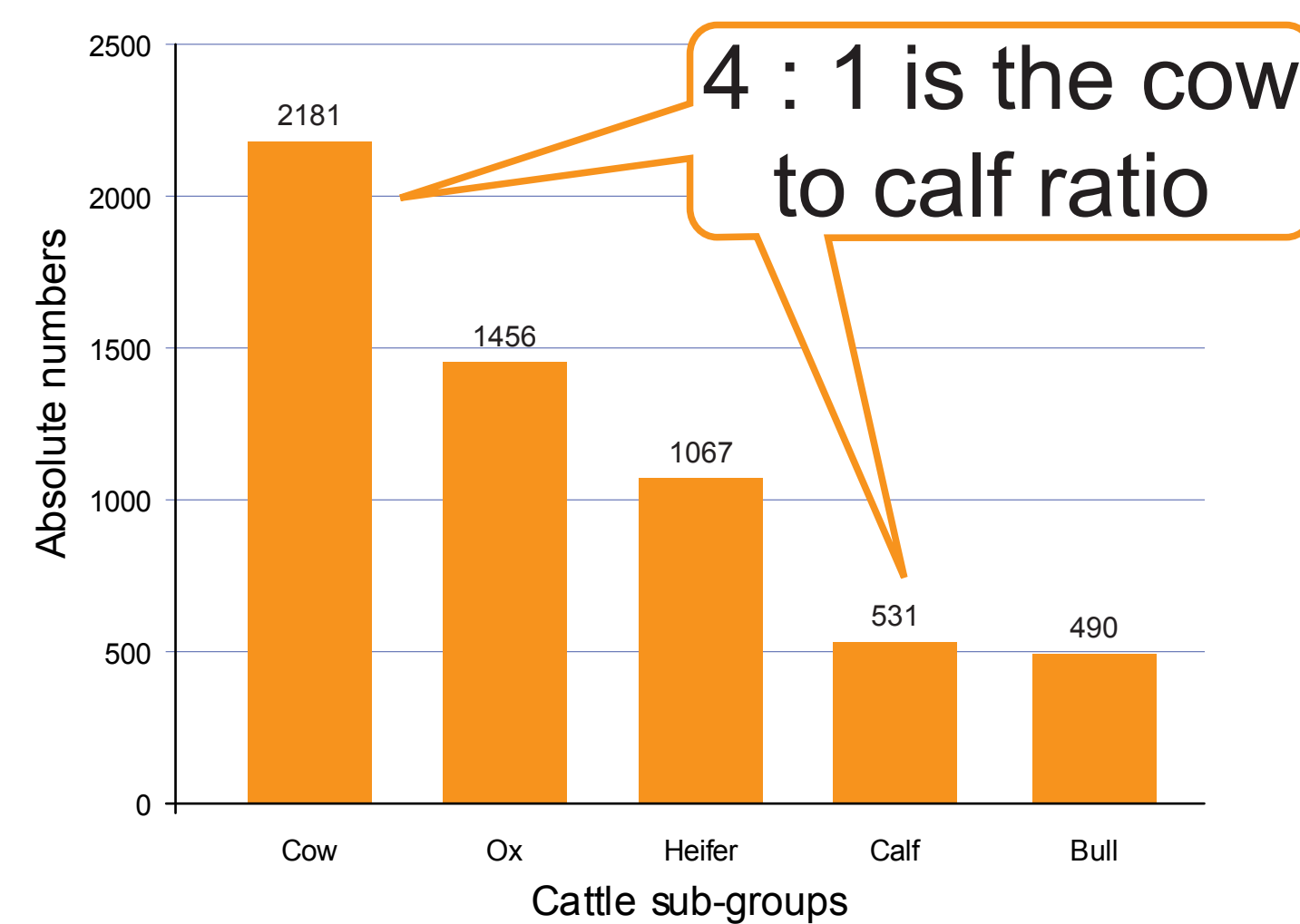Bigger than 20 animals herds were extremely rare (20 of 976 farmers) in the study areas.

> 90% of farmers own less than 11 cattle.

Cattle population cumulative density funtion

There were 5719 cattle owned by 976 farmers in the area, representing 45% of all interviewed farmers in the study.

Results: Population Sub-groups

The cattle sub-groups found in the study area were:
- cows 38%
- oxen 25%
- heifers 19%
- bulls 9%
- calves 9%

> 4 : 1 is the cow to calf ratio

(Bar chart — Absolute numbers vs Cattle sub-groups: Cow 2181, Ox 1456, Heifer 1067, Calf 531, Bull 490)

Both the cow - calf and the cow - bull ratios are ~4:1. This situation speaks of a relatively high bull proportion and low fertility rates. Also of interest is that only 30% of herds contain at least one bull.

This data aggregated hundreds of small cattle herds and does not represent a single production unit.
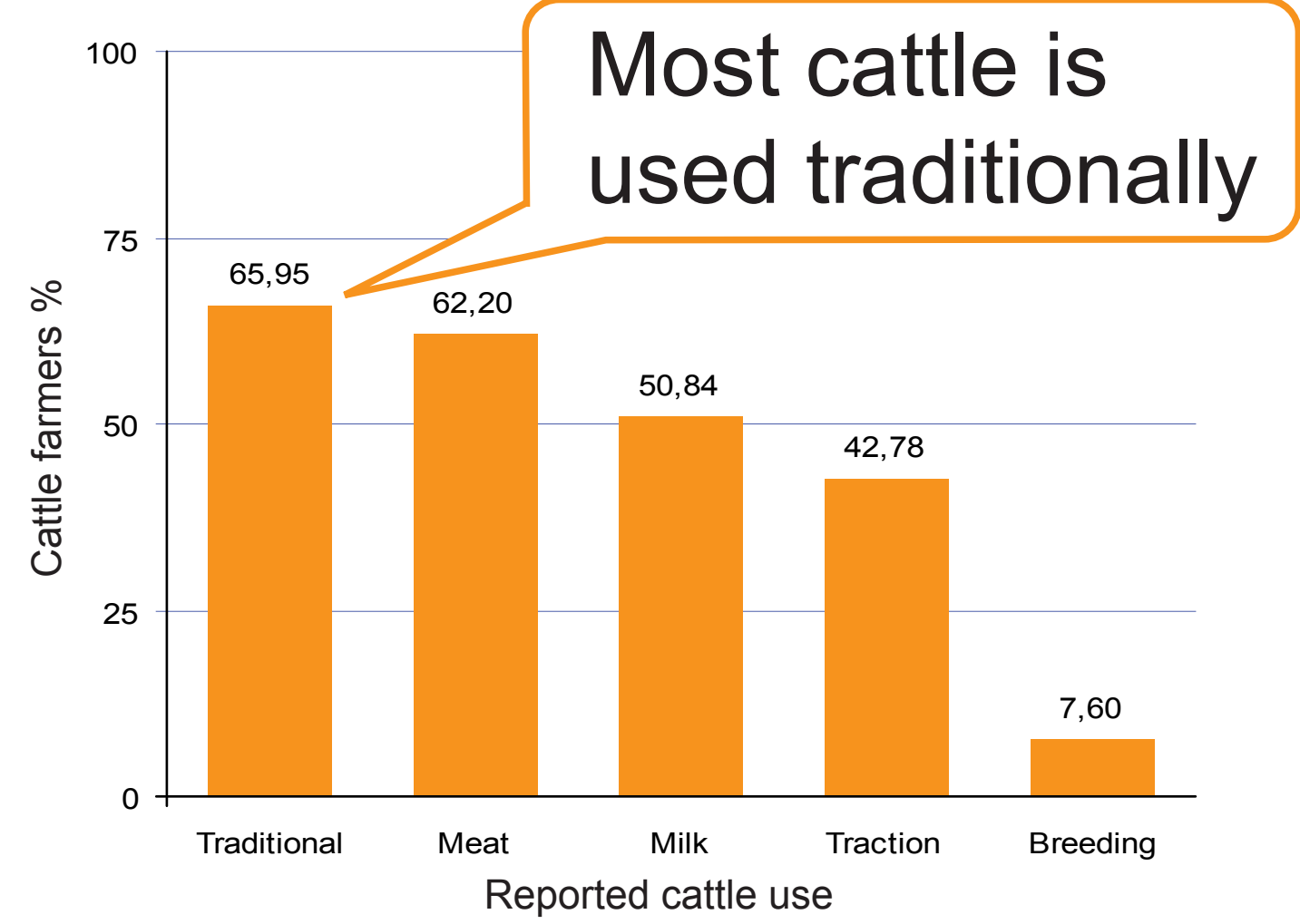
Results: Intended Use

The most commonly reported use for cattle is described as "traditional", meaning as gifts, for ceremonies and also as a source of pride and respect.

Milk and milk derivates are regularly produced.

> Most cattle is used traditionally

(Bar chart — Cattle farmers % vs Reported cattle use: Traditional 65,95; Meat 62,20; Milk 50,84; Traction 42,78; Breeding 7,60)

Meat production, mentioned as one of the main purposes for cattle ownership, is low and animals are rarely slaughtered.
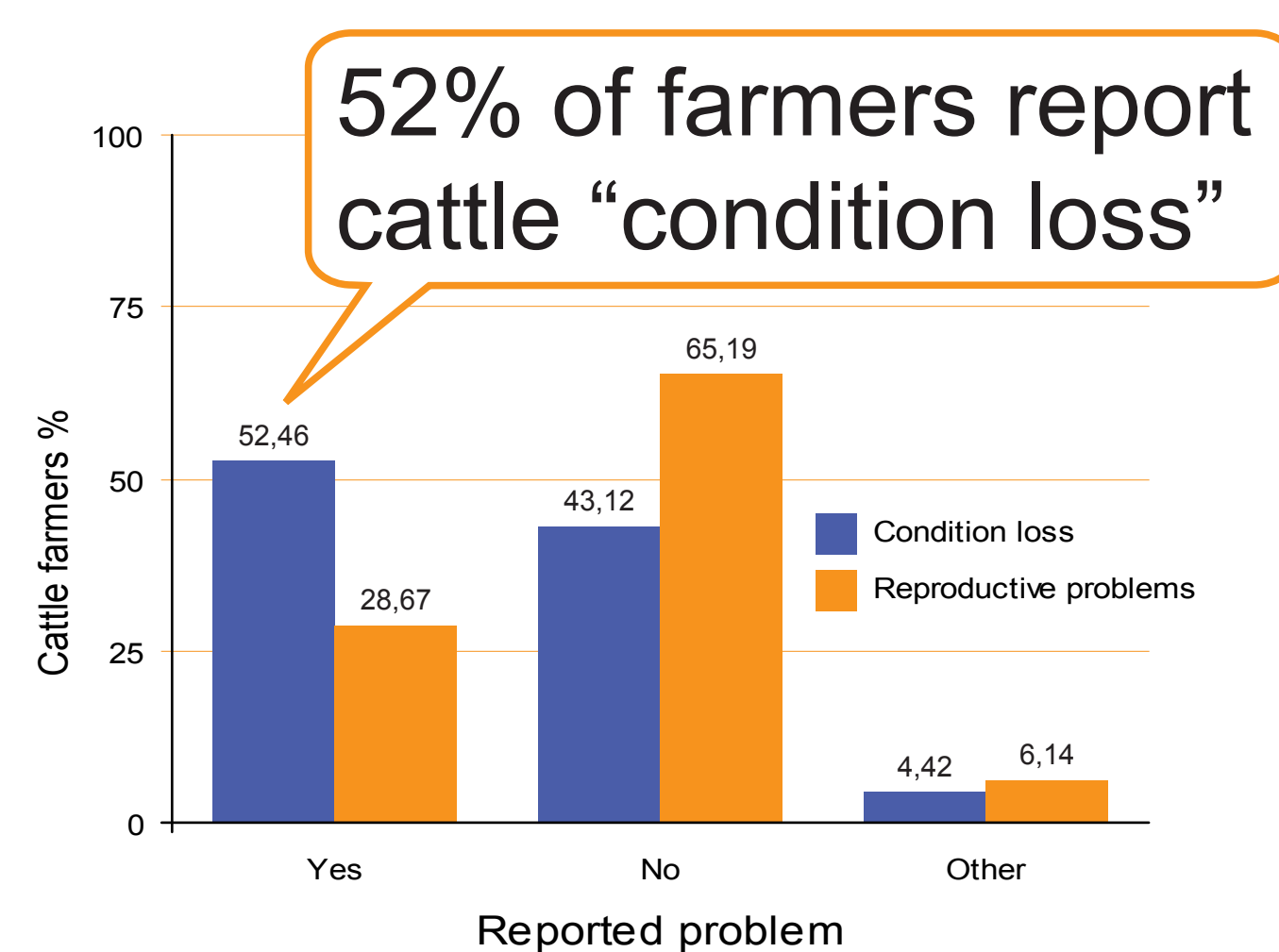
Consequently with the low reproduction ratios, less than 8% of animals are kept for breeding purposes.

Results: Cattle Health

The most commonly mentioned aspects were:

> 52% of farmers report cattle "condition loss"

(Bar chart — Cattle farmers % vs Reported problem, Condition loss / Reproductive problems: Yes 52,46 / 28,67; No 43,12 / 65,19; Other 4,42 / 6,14)

★ "Condition Loss", probably due to natural grass seasonality (the main feed source) and poor sanitary and disease status.

★ "Reproductive problems" were mentioned by almost one third of cattle farmers and is probably due to multiple factors like the already mentioned bad nutritional and disease status.

Conclusions

Main conclusions at this stage are:

★ **Bulls, cows and calves proportions are apparently not appropiate for cattle breeding.**

★ **Although meat and milk production are of interest, the most reported use is still traditional**.

These rural cattle populations have mainly a non-commercial purpose, and therefore recommendations and measures to increase production, animal condition or fertility rates need to consider the strong cultural factors present.