

The Poultry Industry in Crisis: Effect of COVID-19 and Economic Downturn on the Broiler Sector in Western and North Western Provinces in Sri Lanka

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The poultry industry in Sri Lanka is composed of broiler, layer, and backyard sectors. The broiler sector takes precedence because it provides nutritional and economic security to people as an affordable protein source and a provider of employment opportunities. However, the sector faced a severe crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic downturn in the country. Therefore, this study aims to analyse how the above crises affected the operation of the boiler sector from March 2020 to December 2023. The study was qualitative, thus semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. The sample comprised forty-two participants including farmers, veterinarians and consumers engaged in broiler farming selected through convenience sampling from Western and North Western provinces where poultry density is the highest. There were no regional differences in the broiler operations of the above two provinces. The responses were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed using critical content analysis. The findings revealed disruptions in the broiler supply chain, characterized by supply shortages in feed, medicine and labour, fluctuating demand for broiler meat, and logistical constraints. Lockdown measures and travel restrictions hindered the transportation of feed, chicks, and meat, exacerbating production challenges and causing significant losses for farmers. In addition, the closure of restaurants and hotels had shrunk the demand for broiler meat, further exacerbating the crisis. The economic downturn aggravated these challenges, with rising feed costs, currency depreciation, and reduced purchasing power among consumers. Small and medium-scale producers who were deprived of financial reserves and access to credit faced the threat of bankruptcy and loss of livelihood. The study highlights the need for policy interventions to mitigate the crisis and improve the resilience of broiler farmers as a means of recovery from the impacts of the pandemic and the economic downturn to ensure the sustainability of the poultry industry.

Keywords: Poultry, Broiler, COVID-19, Economic Downturn