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Interviewing cows

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It is very hard to get information on fertility and mortality rates, disease incidence and livestock management practices in an extensive livestock production system where herd productivity and health data are not properly handled or not gathered at all. If you ask a farmer: "How many animals died from your herd?", he will not tell you the real numbers but what he imagines the figure to be which will make the interviewer feel sorry for him. But interviewing cows can help in finding reliable data on this subject.

The cow can be asked using the owner as an 'interpreter'. Questions like: "how many times she calved, the years she calved, the fate of her calves (i.e. sold, given away, died of which diseases etc)" can be asked.

This method was useful in determining estimated survival and mortality rates for a sample of farmers during an RRA exercise in Abela Sipa Peasant Association, near Soddo,

southern Ethiopia. Farmers' cows were interviewed in order to learn about cattle productivity and disease patterns, so as to better design animal health care and livestock management programmes in the area. Refer to the cartoon for one example of such an interview, presented here as a case study.

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NOTE

More details of this RRA exercise can be found in: *Farmer Participatory Research in North Omo, Ethiopia*. Report of a training course in Rapid Rural Appraisal, Farm Africa-Ethiopia/IIED, London, October 1991. This is available from IIED or Farm-Africa.

