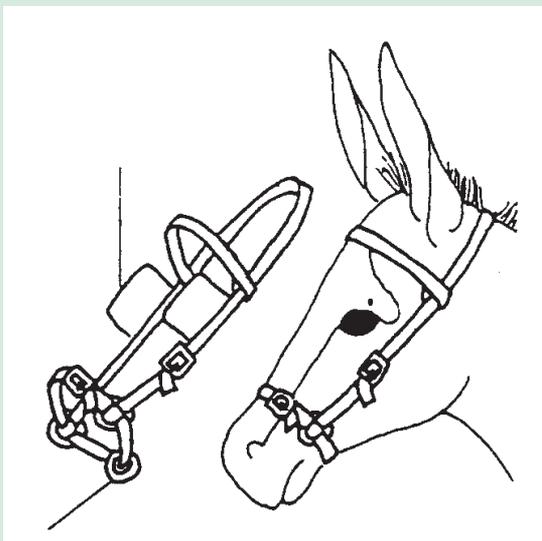
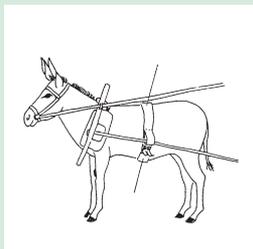
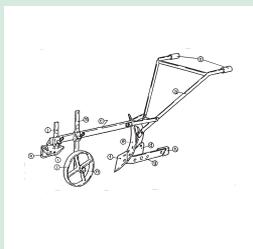


Donkeys for transport and tillage

Agrodok 35 - Donkeys for transport and tillage



partageons les connaissances au profit des communautés rurales
sharing knowledge, improving rural livelihoods

Agrodok 35

Donkeys for transport and tillage

Luurt Oudman

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Author: Luurt Oudman

Editor: Jan H. Loedeman

Illustrator: Barbara Oranje

Design: Ien Ko

Translation: Catherina de Kat-Reynen

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Foreword

Both CTA the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation and the Agromisa Foundation felt a need to add a booklet on animal draft power to Agromisa's Agrodok series. Marg Leydens, who then was the Agrodok publication co-ordinator, came across Draft Animal Technology, a manual for a Bachelor of Science Course in Agricultural Engineering, which I had completed in 1997. This manual is a reflection of part of my work as Farm Power and Machinery lecturer at the University of Nairobi, Kenya. Marg invited me to write an Agrodok booklet on animal draft power. We soon realised that 'animal draft power' implied a scope that was too wide for the Agrodok series. Though we decided to limit the subject to donkeys, all facets of donkey labour should be addressed, including animal care in the broadest sense, training, harnessing, back-packing techniques as well as the description of suitable implements for transport and crop cultivation.

An agricultural engineer myself, I am familiar with the engineering aspects of donkey power. For an adequate coverage of other aspects, however, I had to lean heavily on other publications. My main sources have been 'Draught Animal Power Manual', published by the FAO in 1994, and 'Donkeys for Development' by Peta Jones. I am most grateful to both the FAO and Dr. Jones for allowing me to use their illustrations and certain descriptions. After I had completed the manuscript Janhein Loedeman did an excellent editing job and

Catharina de Kat-Reynen upgraded my English to a UK standard. I also like to express my heartfelt thanks to Barbara Oranje, who took care of the reproduction and improvement of the numerous illustrations and to Ien Ko who completed the layout.

Luurt Oudman
October 2001.

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1 Introduction

Although the donkey is indigenous to the Northeast part of Africa, its use on the continent as a whole is limited. The donkey is probably most appreciated in its true home, in arid and mountainous areas, where it is used most extensively. It is widely acknowledged that these animals can play a major role in rural development.

The steady speed of a donkey's walk is what makes it so popular as a pack animal or for pulling small carts. When properly harnessed and hitched, it is also fairly fast at ploughing. The intelligence of a donkey is often underestimated. A donkey is easy to manage once the animal knows what to do and recognises the appropriate verbal commands. When a donkey refuses to work, it is almost always because the work is impossible for the animal, not because it is "stubborn".

Donkeys are an undervalued power source in a large part of the world. Their potential to work is very high and their contribution to any household or even national economy is considerable. Generally the buying and selling price of donkeys is far below their true value, which should be calculated on the basis of the work they give over the 14 years they are able to work, if well cared for. If a donkey works six hours a day, four days a week over that many years, it will have given about 15,000 hours of work. The low price of donkeys, therefore, is a reflection of distorted perceptions of their role. This situation is changing. In Zambia, for instance, donkeys are now selling for the same price as cattle.

This Agrodok offers insight into the possibilities of donkey use, based on experiences with working donkeys around the globe. It is aimed at farmers, agricultural technicians and extension officers, for rural artisans and for people engaged in rural- and town transport with donkeys. The information provided is meant to assist them in tapping the work potential of the donkey in a manner that is humane for the animal.

The booklet starts in Chapter 2 with ‘Characteristics & Use’. Before a farmer starts working with donkeys he should know what characteristics are important in selecting a good working animal. ‘Care’ is the subject of the next chapter because proper treatment of a donkey is required to make optimal use of its potentials. The most basic use of donkeys is as ‘pack animals’, see Chapter 4. For pulling carts or implements, donkeys need to be trained in a step-wise approach, see Chapter 5. After training, proper harnessing is required to link the animal to the implement effectively, see Chapter 6. Useful implements for transport, primary tillage and crop husbandry are presented and discussed in Chapters 7 through 11.

The illustrations used in this Agrodok originate from other textbooks. We are grateful to the authors of the books for allowing us to use their illustrations. These books are highly recommended for further reading.