

# The Himalayan yak now a food animal

November 30, 2022

**In news**– The Himalayan yak has been accepted as a food animal by the scientific panel of Food Safety and Standard Authority of India (FSSAI), after recommendation from the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD).

## About Yak-

- The domestic yak (*Bos grunniens*), **also known as the Tartary ox, grunting ox or hairy cattle**, is a species of long-haired domesticated cattle found throughout the Himalayan region of the Indian subcontinent, the Tibetan Plateau and other places.
- It is **descended from the wild yak (*Bos mutus*)**.
- Wild yaks once ranged up to southern Siberia to the east of Lake Baikal, but became extinct in Russia around the 17th century.
- Today, wild yaks are found primarily in northern Tibet and western Qinghai, with some populations extending into the southernmost parts of Xinjiang, and into Ladakh in India.
- **The primary habitat of wild yaks consists of treeless uplands between 3,000 and 5,500 m (9,800 and 18,000 ft)**, dominated by mountains and plateaus.
- They are most commonly found in alpine tundra with a relatively thick carpet of grasses and sedges rather than the more barren steppe country.
- The yak may have diverged from cattle at any point between one and five million years ago, and there is some suggestion that it may be more closely related to bison than to the other members of its designated genus.
- **In India, Yak is found throughout the Himalayan region-** Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, North Bengal, Uttarakhand,

Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir while wild Yak is found in Tibet.

- **Its physiology is well adapted to high altitudes, having larger lungs and heart than cattle found at lower altitudes**, as well as greater capacity for transporting oxygen through their blood, due to the persistence of foetal haemoglobin throughout life.
- **The yak plays a multidimensional socio-cultural-economic role for the pastoral nomads** who rear it mainly for earning their nutritional and livelihood security due to the lack of other agricultural activity in the higher reaches of the Himalayan region where it is difficult for animals except the yak to survive.
- Yaks are traditionally reared under a transhumance system which is primitive, unorganised and full of hardship. But the yak population in the country has been decreasing at an alarming rate.
- **According to a census carried out in 2019, India has some 58,000 yaks** – a drop of about 25% from the last livestock census conducted in 2012.
- Research at the NRC-Y has revealed **yak milk is highly nutritious, rich in fat, contains essential minerals and has medicinal values.**
- **The products which are traditionally produced from yak milk are churkum, churpi, ghee and paneer.**
- Mostly consumed locally, yak meat is known to be lean.
- The Indian government established a dedicated centre for research into yak husbandry, the **ICAR-National Research Centre on Yak**, in 1989. It is **located at Dirang, Arunachal Pradesh**, and maintains a yak farm in the Nyukmadung area.
- The **categorisation is expected to help check the decline in the population** of the high-altitude bovine animal by making it a part of the conventional milk and meat industry.
- After this, it will be finally notified in the gazette after approval of competent authority.

- **IUCN: Wild Yak-Vulnerable, CITES Appendix-I.**