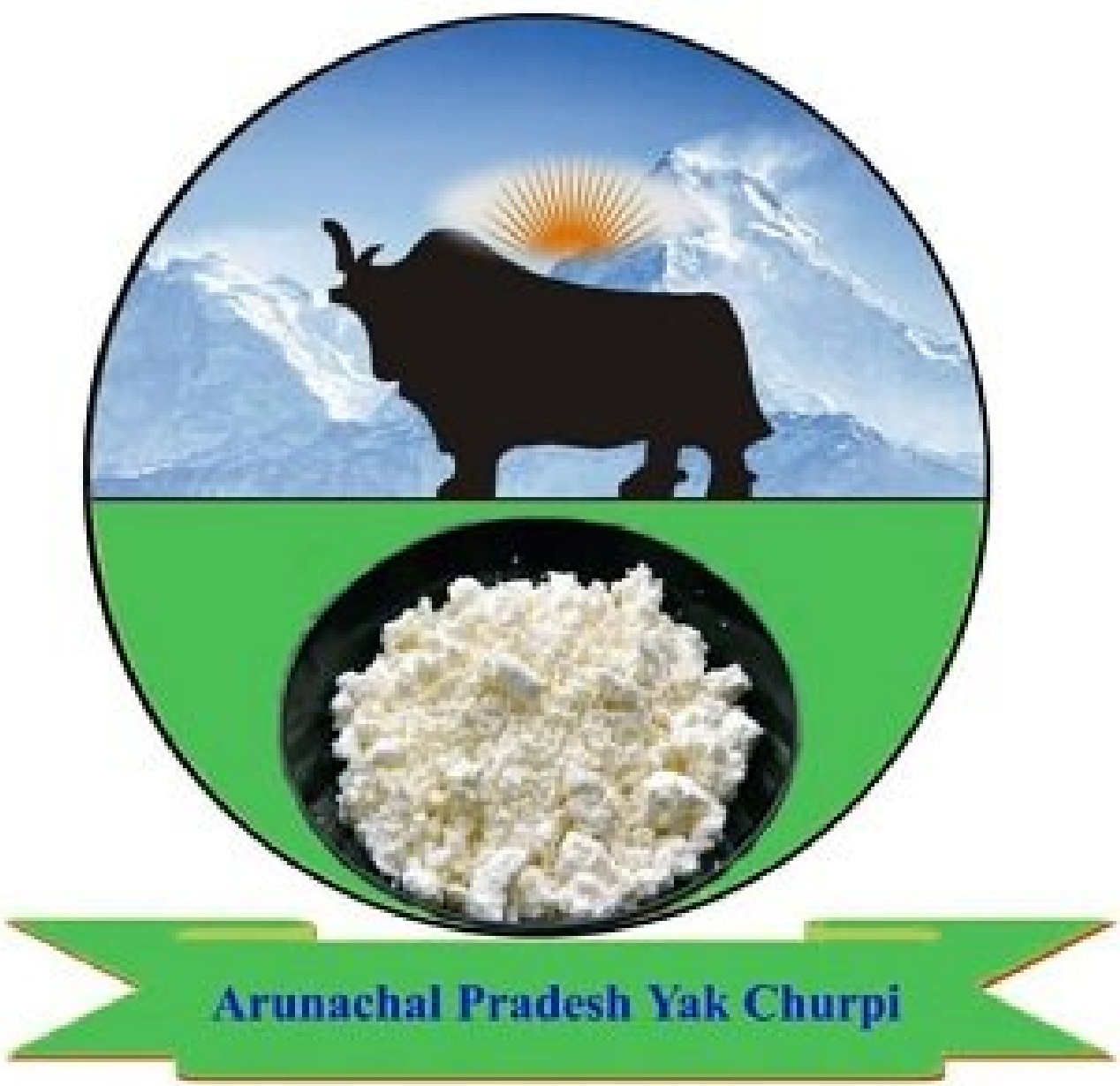
FEATURES | FEATURE

Arunachal Pradesh to promote yak milk products

The Arunachal Pradesh Yak Herders and Products Development Cooperative Society Limited is recently formed by 17 yak rearers under the patronage of the National Research Centre on Yaks (NRCY)

By **Shraddha Warde** | February 23, 2024



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Meat and milk products like Churpi and Ghee from yaks raised in the high altitudes of Arunachal Pradesh could soon be available for sale under the country's first cooperative society consisting of yak rearers. The Arunachal Pradesh Yak Herders and Products Development Cooperative Society Limited has recently formed by 17 yak rearers under the patronage of the National Research Centre on Yaks (NRCY), situated at an altitude of 5,000 feet in Dirang.

The Cooperative Society aims to promote social inclusion of the yak Brokpas, to achieve socio-economic upliftment for the yak herders. Additionally, the society will provide a platform where the yak herders, who are the main stakeholders in this unique livestock enterprise, can take on the major role of decision-makers to ensure the sustainable growth of yak husbandry in the future.

Churpi is a unique dairy product made from the milk of Arunachali yaks. These yaks are a special breed found in the West Kameng and Tawang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Yak Churpi is created by fermenting the yak milk and has received recognition as a Geographical Indication (GI) of Arunachal Pradesh. Dr Mihir Sarkar, the Director of ICAR-National Research Centre on Yak, has said that this recognition is a significant boost to the pastoral production systems and yak rearing in the country.

Churpi is an excellent source of protein and is often used as a substitute for vegetables by tribal yak herders who live in the vegetation-starved, cold, and hilly mountainous regions of the state. It is also commonly mixed in vegetable or meat curry and eaten with rice as a staple food in tribal households. Sarkar has emphasized that Churpi is an integral part of the tangible cultural and tribal heritage of Arunachal Pradesh.

Tage Taki Agriculture Minister of the state said, “In Arunachal Pradesh, 2-3 items are made from Yak milk one is called Churpi, and it is a type of dry chocolate. We also prepare ghee from yak milk. Arunachali Yak is the only registered breed of Yak in India. Yak is a semi-domestic animal and it is difficult to rear yak because in the winter season, yak has to be brought down and in the summer season we have to take it to very high mountains. The migrating process in rearing yak is very difficult. Nowadays people do not want to do it, so we are finding out rearing the process for yak rearing ICAR is working hard to establishment all these things.”

The Arunachali yak breed is raised by tribal yak pastoralists known as Brokpas. These herders migrate along with their yaks to higher reaches (at an altitude of 10,000 ft and higher) during summers and descend to mid-altitude mountainous regions during winters. Since Churpi is prepared at such a high altitude, it is expected to provide benefits to the tribal herders against cold and hypoxia while also providing enriched nutrition. Dr Vijay Paul, Principal Scientist of NRC-Yak who was associated with the GI application process, has informed that the product's registration is going to serve the cause of yak conservation and socio-economic upliftment of yak pastoralists.

The ICAR-National Research Centre on Yak, Dirang applied for the registration of this unique yak product. The institute is closely working with the Brokpas who rear Arunachali yaks and is helping them through research and extension support. The institute's services are of significant value, given that the yak population throughout the country has been declining at a rapid pace due to enormous hardships and dwindling gains associated with pastoral yak rearing.

India has a yak population of around 58,000, with approximately 24,700 located in Arunachal Pradesh. Out of the roughly 2,500 Brokpas nationwide, about 1,200 reside in the state.

Shraddha Warde

shraddha.warde@mmactiv.com

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