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Quarterly e-mail service of the European SAVE Foundation
(Safeguard for Agricultural Varieties in Europe)

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Interlaken – a Milestone Interlaken – and the NGOs



The conservation and promotion of rare livestock breeds occurs on more than one level. It is typically based on the three pillars of State, science and grassroots organisations. In the long-term, conservation will only be successful if the top-down and bottom-up strategies complement each other. Each of these pillars develops at a different pace. The NGOs have been internationally active for a long time (Rare Breeds International globally, SAVE Network in Europe), now the State sector is catching up. On 1st-7th September 2007 State representatives will meet in Interlaken, Switzerland, under the leadership of the FAO for the first “International Technical Conference on Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture”.

With this conference, the FAO has achieved a very significant goal. Together with member States, the FAO has spent many years researching the state of the world's animal genetic resources (livestock breeds). In Interlaken the report “The State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture” will be presented. The FAO has worked continuously towards this goal. It has been a long journey from the data collection for the first edition of the “World Watch List” in 1993 to today's “State of” report. The discussion in Interlaken will not only be about the dangers facing Agrobiodiversity and the current trends, it will also concentrate on the discussion of conservation measures, promotion of old breeds, awareness raising about the use of diversity and the future “management” of the “genetic resources”.

An expected result of the Interlaken conference is the development of a “Global Plan of Action”. However, it is only in the implementation of this action plan that it will become clear how important the theme really is for the member States. The members of the FAO are the governments of individual States. It is up to them to recognise and adopt the priorities. It is the member States who must set the guidelines for further development, who must pass laws and regulations. Most importantly, it is within the member States that the financial means to implement the “Global Plan of Action” must be found!

The representatives of the developed countries attending the conference will be able to bask in the successful work of the grassroots. This work was undertaken - all too often - against the structural policies of the State. Many old breeds are only still in existence

today due to “obstinate farmers” or insightful NGOs consciously mobilising for conservation and tradition. This mobilisation occurred in the face of repression or, at the least, mocking and being classed as yokels. Many of the relicts of old breeds were only found because they were consciously looked for, despite State-level institutions and Universities claiming that all traces had already disappeared and that any action would be pointless..... We have all heard the many excuses used to justify doing nothing.

Many Stakeholders will not be present in Interlaken. At least the organised bodies - the NGOs - could have been involved in the proceedings to a greater extent. The NGOs will not wait until the States think up a task for them. As the past has shown, NGOs both act and challenge. NGOs inhabit a special place in conservation work. They do the work that Governments and Universities cannot usually do: they move the grassroots, they motivate and persuade others that live conservation, when possible *in situ*, is right and must be supported. The NGOs undertake tangible fieldwork, with visible results.

The meeting in Interlaken is of historical importance. After the signing of the “Convention on Biological Diversity” at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the Conference of the Parties (COP) in 1996 set up a work programme with the theme “Agricultural Biodiversity”. The COP recognised the Convention on Biological Diversity and supported within it the activities of the FAO. This is the context within which the “Global Plan of Action for Plant Genetic Resources” was developed by the FAO and the member States. In Interlaken, the intention is to construct a similar global action plan for livestock.

The global action plan must succeed. It is a most significant intergovernmental agreement, which will harmonise the political activity of the various countries in order to set strategic goals and adhere to specific policy. The Plan will be an important component in the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The non-governmental organisations will do their best to help achieve these goals. However, NGOs will not just sit back and follow orders, they have the knowledge and capability to be actively engaged in forming the Plan and its implementation. States should make sure that there is a place, inherent within the regulations, for NGOs involvement. In countries without an NGO presence, the grassroots must be given the chance to organise and to develop. Success can only be found in the cooperation of all stakeholders! (HG)



Interplay between Agrobiodiversity and Nature Conservation: A win-win strategy in conservation work

Without anthropogenic influence, Europe today would be a relatively species poor, dark forest. Over centuries people have bred livestock and cultivated plants especially suited to their local environment. With the sustainable use of the natural surroundings, biologically valuable traditional agro-eco-systems developed within each regional ecosystem. Today these areas of high diversity belong to the most endangered ecosystems. Agricultural diversity (agrobiodiversity) encompasses all components of biological diversity that are relevant to nutrition, farming and the functioning of the agro-eco-system. Within this all types of animals, plants, micro-organisms, fungi, as well as their related wild forms are included. The interaction between environmental factors, farming methods and the genetic resources found in agricultural ecosystems are definitive in the conservation of biodiversity. Thus, agrobiodiversity is an essential, integral part of biological diversity. This conclusion is reflected in the international agreement "Convention on Biological Diversity" signed in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro as well as in further decrees and resolutions (see preceding article).



Rhön sheep: conservation of important regional eco-systems through the grazing of the matgrass varieties on the chalk downs of the biosphere reserve Rhön (<http://www.biosphaerenreservat-rhoen.de>)



The New Forest (Hampshire) England: documentation shows that it has been grazed for more than a thousand years

International legal linkages are important factors for the close cooperation between decision-makers in both agriculture and nature conservation. Yield increases, industrialisation and over-use in agricultural production lead to destruction of ecosystems and biodiversity, not only in the case of wildlife but also domesticated breeds and varieties. Relicts of once extensive regional ecosystems need to be conserved long-term in both sustainable and economically viable ways. Similarly, Agrobiodiversity, with its traditional agro-eco-systems, livestock breeds and cultivated

plants is also endangered. Modern concepts of nature conservation use integrative methods in order to, on the one hand, find acceptance for protected areas within local

populations and on the other hand, as a low-cost and sustainable method of managing open areas. Old livestock breeds and cultivated plants, developed to fit into the relevant regional ecosystem, offer a low-cost alternative to elaborate technical solutions, as the following examples show:

- Grazing with old livestock breeds: robust and bred for sparse conditions they even eat matgrasses and other rough grazing, usually need no more than a shelter. Light-footed and agile, with hard hooves adapted for harsh conditions, they keep even the most fragile areas open.
- Nature conservation with the conservation of old fruit trees: robust orchards, traditional hedgerows with fruit bushes are elements of the landscape worthy of protection. The richness of their structure serves a large community of wildlife as shelter, nesting space and nutrition.
- The cultivation of regionally typical grain and vegetable varieties can be used as a sustainable and environmentally compatible, pesticide free farming method in large nature conservation areas.
- Traditional agro-eco-systems, in which specifically adapted livestock and cultivated plants are used, conserve the functioning of ecological systems promoting soil fertility, regulation of pests and diseases and increase pollination.

The use of rare livestock breeds and cultivated plants in conservation areas is a form of adding value which supports the conservation of the relevant breed and enables sustainable concepts to be carried through.

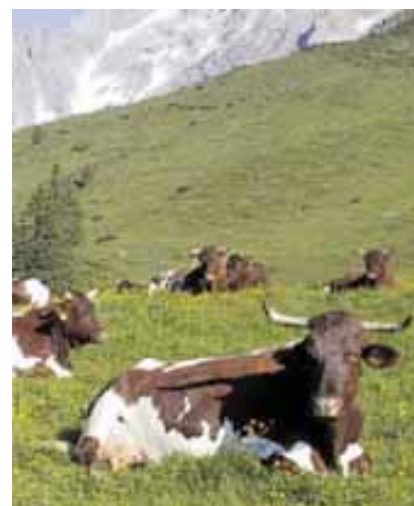
Integrated protection and conservation concepts are exceedingly important. There are already some examples of such complete concepts, especially in the field of livestock conservation:

- Turopolje pigs keep the swamp areas of the Sava flood plain in Croatia open. Many bird species, insects and small mammals profit from this.
- Podgorska red cattle are optimally adapted to the rough matgrass grazing of the Beskids in Poland. Their grazing supports the existence of this unusual type of cultivated landscape.
- Water buffalo at Lake Prespa in Greece act as nature's lawnmowers in the marshlands and keep the undergrowth on the shores in check, which benefits the native wildlife.



Water buffalo in Greece keep the vegetation on the shores of Lake Prespa cleared

- The small and agile Prespa cattle prevent the emergence of shrubland around Lake Prespa.
- The Karakachan sheep in the Rhodopes in Bulgaria and Greece, help to preserve the open park landscapes typical to the area.
- The Karakachan horse are the ecological draft animals in the Rila National Park in Bulgaria
- The Rhön sheep in the central mountainous areas of Germany helps to conserve high moors and semi-arid grasslands with their unique plant populations.
- Original Pinzgau cattle are used in the Austrian National Park "Hohe Tauern" and are elected as "breed of the Park". Their "work" is to be wondered at in many places in the Park and the meat is available in the restaurants. (WK)



Pinzgau cattle: the breed of the National Park "Hohe Tauern" in Austria

SAVE has developed a dossier on this theme of the interplay between Agrobiodiversity and Nature Conservation. It can be downloaded here:

<http://www.save-foundation.net/english/downloads.htm>

Newsflash



EPGRIS 3 – a self-funded initiative on PGR-documentation

Within EPGRIS (European Plant Genetic Resources Information Infra-Structure), a project of the "ECP/GR Documentation and Information Network", the passport data of the European Plant Genetic Resources (PGR) in ex situ collections will be collated for the first time on a pan-European level within one information system (EURISCO = gr. "I find"). EPGRIS 3 will create a user-friendly platform for cooperation: from plant-pathological information sources to bio-informatics and variety registration organisations through to national inventories, all the available information should be presented to the user in an accessible way. This enormous task will be undertaken by the project partners as a self-funded activity. Involvement of all actors and interested parties to PGR-information is greatly hoped for, so that the platform can be created in a comprehensive and lively way. The project is planned for 5 years (2007-2011).

More information: <http://www.epgris3.eu/>

Balkans Network for Agrobiodiversity

In July 2007 the Heidehof Foundation, Stuttgart, extended its support for the Balkans Network for Agrobiodiversity. In Phase III of the project further urgent tasks for the conservation of rare livestock breeds can be taken in hand. Detailed information can be found on the News section of the Balkan Network:

<http://www.agrobiodiversity.net/balkan>

AGRALP – Development of Agrarstructures in the Alpine Space

On the homepage of the European Academy in Bozen (EURAC) c. 200 thematic cards about the agrarstructure and demographic development of the Alpine space can be downloaded in PDF format. They show the development over the last decade of the about 6000 communities within the area of the Alpine Convention as well as the single national areas covered by the Convention. All the information is available in English, German and Italian. More information: <http://www.eurac.edu/agralp>.

Important dates (extract)

26 August: 11th "Rare Breeds Expo" in the "Living Heritage Park", Provincial Domain Puyenbroeck in Wachtebeke (near Gent), Belgium. All Belgian rare breeds of farm animals will be present. Contact: staf.vandenbergh@sle.be, Web: <http://www.sle.be>

1-2 September: 25 year Jubilee ProSpecieRara Foundation, Bern, Switzerland. Contact: info@psrara.org, Web: <http://www.prospecierara.ch>

1-7 Sept: FAO International Technical Conference on Animal Genetic Resources, Interlaken, Switzerland (with exhibition of rare Swiss breeds from ProSpecieRara). Web: <http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/programmes/en/genetics/angrvent2007.html>

8-9 September: International exhibition of sheep and goat breeds of the Alps within the Apinet Gheep project, at Logarska Dolina, Slovenia. Contact: drobnica@km-z.si

8-14 September: World Gathering of Nomads and Transhumant Herders; La Granja (Cantabria), Spain. Contact: pastores.sinfronteras@pastos.org, <http://www.pastos.org>

13.-15. September: EurSafe 2007 - Sustainable Food Production and Ethics. Biocenter of the University Vienna, Austria. Contact: eursafe2007@boku.ac.at, Web: <http://www.nas.boku.ac.at/eursafe2007.html>

14-15 September: Workshop "Agriculture in Alpine Protected Areas - Best practice and NATURA 2000"; National Park Hohe Tauern, Austria. Web: <http://www.alparc.org>, Contact: chloe.manfredi@alparc.org

24-28 September: Second International Conference on Health and Biodiversity (COHAB 2007), Galway. Ireland.



28-30 September: Annual Meeting of SAVE Foundation and SAVE Network on the occasion of the Allitalian Organic Fair in Guastalla (near Parma), Italy. Contact: info@monitoring.eu.com

28-30 September.: European Meeting "Wool in the Home", at the Perigord Eco-Centre, Dordogne (France). Web: <http://perso.wanadoo.fr/atelier.laine>, Contact: atelier5@wanadoo.fr,

29 Sept.: Europ. Agro-Biodiversity Day (**EAD**). PR event to the topic "use it or lose it" (conservation through consumption). Various activities of the SAVE Network organisations in their respective countries. Contact: info@monitoring.eu.com.



29-30 September: 5th Regional Fair "Balkan Agrobiodiversity and Rural Heritage", Dimitrovgrad, Serbia-Montenegro; Exhibition of indigenous Balkan breeds. Contact: balkanika@ptt.yu

12-14 October: IV Biodiversity International Film Festival at Villaggio Globale, Rome, Italy. Contact: crocevia@croceviaterra.it, Web: <http://www.croceviaterra.it>



13-15 October: International Conference "The Role of the Donkey and the Mule in the Culture of the Mediterranean", Island of Hydra (near Athens), Greece. Web: <http://www.geocities.com/DonkeyConference>, Contact: ed.emery@britishlibrary.net,

15 October: International Fruit Congress and Exhibition "Europom 2007" in Luxemburg. Contact: hellef.nord@pt.lu, Web: <http://www.europom.be>

29 October - 2 November: 5th Trondheim Conference on Biodiversity: "Ecosystems and people - biodiversity for development". Contact: finn.kateras@dirnat.no

7-10 November: Conference "Less Favored Areas for Agriculture and Rural Areas", Jihlava, Vysocina region, Czech Republic. Web: <http://www.vuze.cz/EN/>

10-11 November: 7th International Meeting of Pomologists, Forum Alpbach, Tyrol, Austria. Contact: manfred.putz@lk-tirol.at

13-16 November: Conference on Native Breeds and Varieties as part of natural and cultural Heritage, Sibenik, Croatia. Contact: kaps@dzzp.hr, Web: http://www.dzzp.hr/News-032007KAPS_Announcement.htm

15-17 November: First Balkan Symposium on Fruit Growing, Plovdiv, Bulgaria. Contact: fruit_symposium@abv.bg

26-30 November: 2nd International Vavilov Conference "Crop Genetic resources in the 21st Century: Current Status, Problems and Prospect". St.Petersburg, Russian Federation. Web: <http://www.vir.nw.ru>

2008

3-7 March: International Symposium "Underutilized Plants for food, nutrition, income and sustainable development", Arusha, Tanzania. Contact: underutilized-species@cgiar.org, Web: <http://www.icuc-iwmi.org/Symposium2008/index.htm>