

**European Commission Council Regulation (EC) N° 870/2004
AGRI GEN RES 2006**

HERITAGE SHEEP

**Heritage Sheep Review and Steering Group (HSRSG)
Final meeting – Amsterdam NL 6th July 2009**

Minutes

Present

Dianna Bowles
David Clayton
Duncan Rotherham
Olivier Diana
Richard Hardwick
Mike Roper
Dominique Planchenhault
Amanda Carson
Delphine Duclos
Drago Kompan
Danjela
Andreas Geogoudis
Yvette de Haas
Sipke Joost Hiemstra

Apologies John Woolliams

Introduction Dianna Bowles

Diana Bowles welcomed the delegates to the final meeting of AGRI GENRES 2006 Action 40 Heritage Sheep.

Objectives for the day

1. To decide the publication strategy for the project - dissemination of information to the general public and academic publications
these should be in the form of an easily accessible report, providing information from the project to show the significance of outputs, in addition to the website
2. The significance of Heritage sheep breeds to European farming, including their contribution to the environment.
We now have evidence of the role and the risk of these breeds, and therefore need to decide how best to incorporate the findings into policy and regulations.

WP1

Amanda Carson gave a presentation on the associated publication in Livestock Science,(2009)Carson,A.,Elliott,M,Groom,J.,Winter,A.,and Bowles,D.doi:10.10./j.livsci.2008.11..026

The paper used detailed census data and geo-referencing to accurately map the distribution of a number of Heritage Sheep breeds for the first time. It revealed that many of them are highly concentrated in a single location – massively increasing their vulnerability to disease.

The Sheep Trust team studied 16 regional breeds, selected to represent different parts of the UK. Combining a detailed census of flocks with the latest GIS mapping technology and statistics, the team plotted the distribution of regional breeds across the British Isles. The results revealed that the genetic resources of commercially farmed sheep breeds existing in significant numbers can be endangered through their geographical isolation.

WP2

Delphine Duclos presented the final report on the Development and evaluation of strategies for *in situ* conservation.

The report highlighted the differences in population sizes 900 – 300,000 which led to difficulties in making comparisons due to different strategies employed.

Nevertheless HSB's live in challenging regions with adverse climates, so that the breeds are characterised by their adaptations and all play an important role in the environment.

Breed societies assume different roles in the different European countries, for example, French breed societies, contribute to performance recording. However, there is still some variation between the breed societies within France.

Valorisation of products is undertaken in the different countries, but the structure varies. The focus however is always on quality of the product.

PDO recognition is used for the products from some breeds. All products are recognized as being of higher quality, with or without PDO status.

The conclusion of the report was that all Heritage sheep breeds exhibit an ability to live in harsh environments. And that in general are not in competition with mainstream breeds within the same geographical area.

The meeting agreed that conservation needs to address the issues of breed, region and production.

WP3 and 4

Yvette de Haas reported that work package three had been completed and a report entitled 'Survey of organisation, actual stocks, and procedures of *ex situ* conservation of Heritage Sheep Breeds' was Published: August 2008

Henri Woelders' report focused on:

1. Identification of collection and cryopreservation strategies through a detailed survey.
2. Comparison and evaluation of the practicalities involved in various collection & freezing methods of semen, embryos and tissues.
3. Development and implementation of strategies for *ex situ* conservation, tailored for HSBs in Europe.

Conclusions from this report

Selecting procedures differ per country

Ejaculated semen

Epididymal semen

Freezing procedures may differ per country

Freezing media contain egg yolk and glycerol as cryoprotectants.

No clear preference for a particular freezing medium or freezing procedure.

WP4 focused on the collection and storage of 15 breeds, which were selected for conservation using 40 rams per partner country.

- France: Rava, Limousine, Bizet, Causses du Lot
- Greece: Frisarta, Boutsiko, Katsika
- Netherlands: Kempen Heath, Milksheep, Black Blazed
- Slovenia: Bela Krajina, Istrian Pramenka, Bovska
- UK: Lonk & Shetland

Work in progress

- Greece: Collection of ejaculate semen of Frisarta and epididymal semen of Katsika in July
- Netherlands: Collection of ejaculate semen of Milksheep planned in July & August 2009

Information was also collected to provide information for the database CRYOWEB.

Journalistic Interviews were also undertaken with partners to provide background to the process of organising the semen collections and the difficulties encountered. These will be prepared as 'coffee table' style reports.

WP5

Christina Ligda gave a presentation showing the development of the website to date. Each of the web pages, was demonstrated on the PowerPoint, showing how the database could be accessed and examples of the breeds descriptions in English, and the partner country language. The database was converted to a geo – database and the implementation had progressed this year on geographical representation of the breeds and related information, utilising geographical data to NUTS level 3. In the primary analyses some static maps with results were developed, where the breeds were represented by geographical location, by population size, farm at age and population trends.

The work has been developed by developing a dynamic application running under ARCGIS server. This is the first time that this type of system has been utilised to represent sheep populations.

Further developments could include:

- an index for the assessment of the threats to breeds
- upload the static maps with results in the website
- website counter

Temporarily, the application has been run on the Holstein server but it will be moved to the server of the Centre for Agricultural Research of Northern Greece, NAGREF..

. In addition, there are no permanent systems in place for collecting information in different countries.

Richard Hardwick

Richard Hardwick has been consulted by the EU commission to assist with dissemination of material from the 17 GENRES projects.

Action 40 Heritage Sheep will be the first AGRI GENRES to complete and may well form the framework for how material from all the projects will be disseminated.

It is anticipated that the commission will produce a website which will provide an introduction for all 17 projects. In addition, a leaflet will be produced for each project, and Richard Hardwick, presented an example of a leaflet for Heritage sheep.

The leaflet will be aimed at a general audience, and therefore needs to be easily understood and will be in addition to technical reports and papers.

It is envisaged that the leaflet will run to 10 pages, with the cover page introducing the community programme.

Dianna Bowles thanked Richard for his example and it was agreed that Diana would undertake, in consultation with the partners, to provide Richard with a working document before the end of August.

Olivier Diana

Olivier Diana is the representative from the directorate general for agriculture and rural development.

Olivier gave a presentation outlining the functions of the directorate General, and a discussion of the most frequently asked questions by participants of AGRI GENRES projects.

The deadlines for outputs of financial and technical reports were stressed with the final report to be submitted by the end of December 2009. There is no flexibility for this date.

This included the objectives of the communication policy;

- Make publicity and disseminate the results of the actions via other media (press, conferences, etc...)
- Targets: scientists, stakeholders, farmers, breeders, consumers, Ministries, organisations, institutions, etc...

The website for DG AGRI http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/envir/biodiv/genres/index_en.htm

Financial report

Duncan Rotherham gave a presentation on the provisional expenditure up to 31/03/09.

A 10% leeway is allowed however any anticipated problems on spending under any of the budget headings needs to be identified and discussed. Estimates of future spending within the budget headings would be helpful, to determine if there is any understand.

All expenditure must be incurred and paid by 30/09/09.

All financial reports to be returned to Duncan Rotherham as soon as possible.

Reports

The final interim report for the period 01/04/09 – 30/09/09 will focus on WP4 and WP5.

The final report covering the whole period of action will be compiled by David Clayton. David will provide a draft by the end of August and final inputs from all partners throughout September will allow the report to be finalised.

Close of meeting

Dianna Bowles thanked everyone for their goodwill and efforts. The interesting projects and outputs form the foundation for taking the conservation of Heritage sheep breeds forward.

Some questions remain on what will happen to the collections of semen at the end of the project, however, this remains the responsibility of member states and the formation of their national semen

collections. For example, in the UK the semen will be kept by the Sheep Trust with the possibility of part of this being donated to the National collection currently being developed by the National Sheep Association and the Rare Breeds Survival Trust.

In the long term there is a vision for an EU gene bank or network of gene banks.

Similarly there is the issue of continuation of the database which could go to AFABIS or EAAP.

Support for Heritage Sheep Breeds through the Rural Development Regulation should also be considered.

A presentation of the outputs of the Heritage Sheep project will be given to the 15th ERFPA Annual Workshop in Barcelona in 23 August 2009.

Furthermore an oral presentation is planned to the 60th EAAP Annual Meeting in Barcelona, 24-27 August, on the use of the GIS in HERITAGESHEEP project.

The meeting closed.