

SAVE-News special (April 01)

This newsletter is issued four times a year by SAVE Foundation (Safeguard for Agricultural Varieties in Europe)

Foot-and-Mouth Disease and Endangered Livestock Breeds (Letter to the EU Commission on April 11, 2001)

SAVE Foundation as an European NGO umbrella organisation is actively promoting the in-situ conservation of endangered livestock breeds and cultural plants in Europe. In the frame of this capacity, with regard to the measures to control the foot-and-mouth disease, to the special situation of old and endangered livestock breeds and the genetic resources potential they represent for European agriculture, we have addressed to the responsible persons at the EU Commission the following:

Endangered livestock breeds represent an important genetic reserve, especially with regard to future breeding aims and to future changes in agriculture (high resistance to diseases, hardiness and good life-time performance, increased ability to tolerate extreme climates, e.g. mountainous regions res. good utilisation of extensively produced food, suitability of a breed for landscape management etc.). The production of high-quality food (label-awarded) and the often only locally existent production methods for these specialities are closely related to certain local breeds.

Together with our partner organisations on country level, we are convinced that in the actual situation, an urgent call for action exists with respect to the situation of the rare livestock breeds on the common level. Within the frame of their own projects, the SAVE Foundation and its partner organisations have taken several measures to reduce the risk of infection of the rare livestock breeds (immediate stop of any animal transports, cancelling of animal shows of the different breeding organisations etc.).

Not at least because of the Convention on Biological Diversity of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro 1992, we would like to emphasise that the Member States of the European Community have obliged themselves to conserve genetic diversity in the area of agrobiodiversity ¹⁾.

¹⁾ The Convention on Biological Diversity defines in article 2 the purposes of this convention:

- "Biological diversity" means the variability among living organisms from all sources; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.
- "Country providing genetic resources" means the country supplying genetic resources collected from in-situ sources, including populations of both wild and domesticated species, or....

Rash generalised measures to fight the foot-and-mouth disease might lead to the disappearing of the last remains of still existing endangered livestock breeds in Europe. All the efforts of the last years to conserve agrobiodiversity on a common level, such as the decrees 2078/92, 1257/99 and the decree 1467/94 could be endangered by the presently favoured measures.

Therefore, SAVE Foundation postulates, in agreement with its partner organisations, the following measures and demands:

- Endangered breeds of farm animals are mostly kept in small and decentralised breeding groups. Special exceptional approvals for an adequate quarantine of not infected breeding groups in the wider surroundings of infected farms or farm enterprises should be made possible. We mainly deal here with stocks of small numbers which are easy to control from a veterinary point of view.
- Change of the up-to-date practised vaccination: authorisation of the vaccination for clearly defined stocks of endangered livestock breeds which are already known within the frame of the decree 2078/92 res. 1257/99.
- Promotion of the development and use of improved and marked vaccines.
- Elaboration of an EU emergency decree, which is especially cut to secure the stocks of endangered livestock breeds in the actual situation. This should only be done in collaboration with the FAO, the respective governmental bodies and the NGOs active in this area.
- Out of ethical reasons, we have to decline the actual practice of slaughtering and destroying millions of mostly healthy animals because of economical considerations.

The SAVE Foundations asks to fulfil the obligations the Member States of the EU have agreed upon in the Convention on Biological Diversity, especially in the actual situation. An irretrievable loss of the up to date still present genetic resources in agriculture will have economic, cultural and political consequences which we cannot estimate at present.

The SAVE Foundation thanks for the elaboration of suitable immediate measures in order to protect the endangered breeds in the present situation.

Signed:

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