

EDITORIAL

FAO's Programme for the Management of Farm Animal Genetic Resources is now a reality! The 174 Member Governments of FAO met in Rome October 1995 to consider the Organization's Programme of Work and Budget for the next biennium and beyond. Implementing the Global Strategy for the Management of Farm Animal Genetic Resources (AnGR) was accepted by the Conference as a priority. Broadening the Commission on Plant Genetic Resources to form the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, with animal genetic resources to be included as the first step in the expansion process, will provide a unique intergovernmental mechanism for input into the Global Strategy for AnGR.

What is the Global Strategy? It is an activity aimed at stimulating, facilitating and coordinating country driven plans of action. The design and implementation of sound plans of action are required to substantially upgrade the way essential animal genetic resources are used to produce the great range of direct and indirect products required to satisfy our daily needs. The Global Strategy comprises four basic components: (1) the intergovernmental mechanism, mentioned above, to enable governments to discuss the issues and develop policies and ownership; (2) a country-based global structure of three levels - national focal points, regional focal points and the global focus at FAO Headquarters; (3) a broad technical programme of work covering all key areas in the management process, viz. documenting and describing; developing, using and maintaining; facilitating access to; and reporting on, the range of unique animal genetic resources of interest to food and agriculture; (4) cadres of experts to help in maximizing the cost-effectiveness of the Strategy's delivery.

The Strategy fully integrates with the Convention on Biological Diversity which highlights the conservation of resources, their sustainable use, and sharing of benefits. Further, the Convention clearly recognizes that countries have sovereignty over their resources; hence with this ownership comes responsibility for their conservation.

Why be involved? Successful global management of animal genetic resources must be country-led and sound management must involve all stake-holders. At the national level these stakeholders include farmers and farm service organizations and local communities; educators, trainers and researchers; non-governmental organizations; administrators and policy makers in departments of agriculture, natural resources and environment, international and foreign affairs. Agencies involved in international cooperation - both donor and loan, are also included in the spectrum of stake-holders. Although conservation of animal genetic resources is a national responsibility, there is a growing number of intergovernmental, nongovernmental and other international agencies becoming actively involved. They have a key role to play in helping to establish national management action plans by supporting such activities as training, technical advice, infrastructure development and the mechanisms for sharing of benefits and dealing with emergencies.

How to be involved? Individuals and groups can obtain further insight into the Strategy and better understand opportunities for involvement, by connecting to the Domestic Animal Diversity Information System (DAD-IS). DAD-IS serves as the global axis for implementing the Strategy and beginning March 1996 can be accessed through the Internet on the Web (<http://www.fao.org/dad-is>). For those lacking Internet access, a stand-alone version of DAD-IS will be provided in late 1996.

Opportunities for involvement may also be pursued with the National Focal Point for the Global Programme. At the invitation of FAO countries are being asked to identify coordinating institutions to be responsible for the national network and contact for the Global Programme. National Focal Points have now been established in some 50 countries of Europe and Asia. National Focal Points in other regions of the world will become operational during 1996 and 1997.

Governments are involved in the Programme through their membership in FAO and their participation on the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. Mechanisms are being developed to further involve the range of international institutions such as the International Agricultural Research Centres, donor and loan agencies, and international NGOs.

In addition to development of DAD-IS and continuing efforts to establish the country-based global network of National and Regional Focal Points, other key activities under-way to initiate the Programme include: plans for the launch of the Centre for Domestic Animal Diversity - the Global Focus for the Programme; release of the 2nd edition of the World Watch List for Domestic Animal Diversity; development of multi-language brochures describing the Global Strategy. Plans are also under-way for a mechanism to facilitate involvement of donor and loan agencies; and preparation has begun for intergovernmental consideration of animal genetic resources.

Please consider being involved.

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