

Report of the meeting to encounter the Estonian stakeholders for the Farm Animal Breeding and Reproduction Technology Platform

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The meeting to encounter the Estonian stakeholders for the Farm Animal Breeding and Reproduction Technology Platform was held in Tartu on April 3rd, 2007. The venue was the University of Agriculture. Katrin Reili, Representative of the Ministry of Agriculture, chaired the meeting.

Representatives of the major animal industries and breeders organizations, researchers of Animal Science Institutes, and technicians of the Ministry of Agriculture were invited to attend the meeting. There were 33 people attending the meeting.

After a short presentation to explain the role and the functioning of the technology platforms in the EU policy, it was fully presented the Farm Animal Breeding and Reproduction Technology Platform. The presentation was directed to explain the reason of the making of the platform and then the activities so far. Finally it has been described the first draft of the Strategic Research Agenda. The people attending the meeting were then stimulated to express their view on the FABRE technology platform in general and more specifically the comments, advises and criticisms about the first draft of the Strategic Research Agenda.

During the meeting, the importance of the mirror group role was explained. Representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture showed interest to organize the Estonian mirror group.

After collecting the comments, the list was sent back to those who attended the meeting for possible corrections and additions. The final list is then detailed:

1. The audience explained that is very important to give support to research aiming to improve the beef cattle industry
2. More research should be given to emphasize the environmental importance of animal breeding, especially for sheep farming. To enhance the research by reducing the negative impact on environment by animal farming and to enhance, instead, the positive aspects of pasturing
3. Much more emphasis should be given to improve fertility performances in sheep industry
4. The problem of appropriate recording system for meat production for cattle and sheep must be investigated to improve the efficiency and the proper use for the selection purpose
5. Much more emphasis should be given to improve the longevity, reproduction traits and fitness. It was debated the influence of genetic improvement for increasing the production quantity and quality and at the same time the average inbreeding level causing, therefore, reduction in fitness and reproductive traits
6. More emphasis in the SRA should be given to growth and production traits to enhance economic efficiency in aquaculture industry
7. The small ruminants reproduction system is heavily influenced by the season. The productivity of small ruminant industry, very important in the Mediterranean area, can be enhanced by research on this subject. The possibility to manage the reproduction season will give the possibility to better handle the flock
8. It was also added that the genetics of micro-organisms in the rumen and in all the digestive tract

9. One comment shared by most of the participants was to give more prioritization, for there is the possibility that such a large number of items in the SRA will weaken the research strategy
10. There is also the need to improve the research looking at correlation of animal traits and food quality and healthy food
11. The aspects of welfare should be tackled for all species
12. The breeding schemes for small ruminants must be properly identified. The breeding schemes for small ruminants have been mainly taken by the broadly utilized cattle schemes. Those schemes, though were of some use, were not quite appropriate for small ruminants for the many differences between cattle and sheep and goat production and reproduction systems. The survival of sustainable livestock system in the Mediterranean area is possible only with proper studies and application of breeding schemes for small ruminants
13. There should not be so much emphasis in the Strategic Research Agenda (SRA) on GM organisms, since the current and probably the future EU policies will forbid their creation and use.
14. There should be more emphasis about technology transfer about animal breeding for extensive systems, especially for marginal areas. Researches about how to apply research on prolificacy, artificial insemination and reduction of age at first breeding, would be vary important.
15. The audience did a strong criticism about the poor representation of livestock systems within the EU countries. It is clear that in the Steering Committee there is no representation of Southern and East Europe. In the main working group, the situation is almost the same. Moreover the audience noticed that there is not a single Portuguese experts in the around sixty scientists working for the thirteen working groups.
16. A question was raised about why there is a single working group for cattle, since there are two very distinct livestock systems, one of dairy and one for beef cattle and the research to perform on those systems are dissimilar.
17. It was note that too much prominence and priorities has been giving to “-omics” fields of research. Such research has been carried on already for twenty years and since then, very little has been achieved and almost nothing has been applied. Almost the entire breeding schemes made use of quantitative genetics technologies and the only extensively spread reproductive technology is the artificial insemination. It is felt as very important that if many resources are given to genomic, for instance, there will not be enough for the research of technologies that are really applied and use extensively.
18. Another suggestion was to consider that for many conditions the breeding objectives should be less than optimum about productive level. The breeding objective should be to have an animal that fits well and has high efficient production in the systems in which is bred. An example would be to look for animals that are able to have good productions in marginal areas. Finally, the suggestion was to consider breeding and reproduction technologies for low input systems.
19. Another suggestions was to dedicated more words in the SRA about local breeds of small ruminants. The research for local sheep and goats breeding systems is important for animal farming in marginal areas. The presence of this type of breeding is common n the Portuguese rural areas and the research applied to improve the overall efficiency of those systems will be crucial for the wellbeing of people thereby living.
20. The research on animal breeding should also consider the quality of products of animal origin. It was noted that too much emphasis has been given to quantity level of production. Also great importance is given to the production of healthy food. The Portuguese attendance suggested that more importance must be given to the quality of

products from local breeds that, to be able to be economically efficient, must maintain the existing niche market.

21. It has been noted that the training activities and dissemination was not properly considered in the SRA. The attendance thought that training activities is essential to achieve the objectives of maintaining the world leadership of European expertise in animal breeding and reproduction technology