

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

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The meeting to encounter the Maltese stakeholders for the Farm Animal Breeding and Reproduction Technology Platform was held in Msida on June 26th, 2007. The venue was the Institute of Agriculture. George Attard, Director of the Institute of Agricultural Science of the University of Malta, was chairing the meeting.

Representatives of animal industries, breeders' organizations, public institutions, scientists were invited to attend the meeting. There were 10 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 FABRE TP. The reason of the creation of the platform and then the activities so far were explained during the presentation. Finally the Maltese animal science and industry community were aware of 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. It looks that there will be the interest to create a National 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 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. It was underlined that a very important field to study is how to improve reproduction traits in hot climate. In Malta there are great problems for the low reproductive ability due to hot temperature for large part of the year. The possibility to manage the reproduction season will give the possibility to better handle the flock
2. The participants to the meeting expressed the intention for Maltese livestock systems, there will be the need to concentrate to few locally important subjects, in other words to give more prioritization, for there is the possibility that a large number of items in the SRA will weaken the small national research strategy
3. Because it is important to enhance the local products have large quality and related to local genotypes and environments, there is also the need to improve the research looking at correlation of animal traits and food quality and healthy food
4. Another very important suggestion was that the SRA should better consider that for the Mediterranean conditions the breeding objectives should be less than optimum about productive level. The main breeding objective should be to look for animals fitting well and having 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 and dry areas. Finally the suggestion was to consider breeding and reproduction technologies for low input systems.
5. The research on animal breeding and reproduction should also consider the quality of products of animal origin. It was noted that too much emphasis has been given to quantity of production. Moreover great importance is given to the production of healthy

food. The Maltese 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.

6. The audience gave also importance to the preservation of the local genetic pools. In some cases the local genetic pools should be re-introduced, if lost, for their importance to the production of healthy and quality food. In fact in many situations some local breeds were lost for the low economic efficiency of their farming and for social changes. If those breeds are also present in close countries, a research about re-introduction to the original place must be planned
7. A very interesting breeding objective should be to look for animals' fitness. The objective is to obtain high efficient production in the systems in which the animals are bred. An example would be to look for animals that are able to have good productions in marginal areas. In Malta 28% of the country is occupied by concrete buildings. The rest is not usable land, poor pasture and semi-arid arable land. For this reason there is the necessity to consider breeding and reproduction technologies for low input systems
8. One of the traditional farming in Malta is the rabbit farming. It will be of high importance to consider to perform research for breeding rabbits to improve the efficiency of this type of livestock system
9. Among the research to conduct for reproduction systems, there is the necessity to improve the early pregnancy diagnosis. The Maltese community believe that this should be a research objective
10. Considering the geographical location of Malta, the audience thought that it is very important to enhance breeding efficiency in hot environments. This research will also be useful for other Southern European countries like Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece and Cyprus
11. More emphasis on animal welfare is also requested, considering the importance of this aspect for civil society and for efficiency in animal farming
12. The audience also commented that it will be very important to share experiences with close regions having similar breeding system. This objective could be reached with the creation of a network or the strengthening of existing networks. It is also very important to create synergies.
13. Moreover the role of dissemination and of training must be emphasized.
14. More emphasis in the SRA should be given to growth and production traits to enhance economic efficiency in aquaculture industry