

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

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The meeting to encounter the Portuguese stakeholders for the Farm Animal Breeding and Reproduction Technology Platform was held in Fonte Boa (Santarem) on January 16th, 2007. The venue was the “Estação Zootécnica Nacional” (EZN) that is the Portuguese Animal Science National Research Centre. The Director of EZN, Joao Manuel Ramalho Ribeiro, was chairing the meeting.

Representatives of the major animal industries and breeders organizations, of all the Animal Science Institutes of the Portuguese universities and of public institutions, as the Ministry of Agriculture were invited to attend the meeting. There were 47 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 presentation was directed to explain the reason of the creation 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. The people participating to the meeting invited Dr. Ramalho Ribeiro to take the leadership of the mirror group, He was invited to create and manage the mirror group and to act as a link person between the FABRE TP management and technical bodies and the Portuguese relative mirror group.

After collecting the comments, the list was sent back to the representative of the Portuguese mirror group, J.M. Ramalho Ribeiro, who took the duty to circulate it among those who attended the meeting for possible corrections and additions. The final list is then detailed:

1. 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.
2. There should be more emphasis about technology transfer of 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 very important.
3. The audience did a strong criticism about the poor representation scheme 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.
4. 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.
5. 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 nowadays 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 a lot of resources are given to genomic, for instance, there will not be enough for the research of technologies that are really applied and used extensively.

6. 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 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 areas. Finally the suggestion was to consider breeding and reproduction technologies for low-input systems and not only for high-input systems.
7. Another suggestions was to dedicated more room 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 in 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.
8. 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 remain economically efficient, must maintain the existing niche market by providing good quality products.
9. 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