

In situ conservation - the Swiss model, joint anniversary 30 years ÖNGENE – 25 years DAGENE, 30.8.2012, Wels, Austria

Summary

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Switzerland has a very long tradition in animal breeding and is therefore rich in species and breeds. Over the past 100 years, some old breeds have disappeared and new ones have been introduced. In 1938, the Swiss Government reclassified breeds in breeds to be encouraged and those not to be encouraged. The aim was to organize the unmanageable variety of diversity in breeds and local types. Some breeds survived nevertheless thanks to enthusiastic breeders and they are still here today.

In 1994, the Swiss Parliament ratified the Convention on Biodiversity. With this ratification, Switzerland expressed its willingness to survey, preserve and encourage Biodiversity through appropriate measures. In 1996, the Federal Office for Agriculture charged an ad hoc working group with the task of working out the following issues: define the term „Swiss breed“, establish an inventory and describe the breeds, evaluate cultural, economic and genetic values as well as needs for action. In his final report the working group proposed to set up a secretariat on genetic resources for farm animals, to take specific measures for encouragement and to provide necessary financial resources for support of rare breeds. These proposals led to a revision of the Ordinance for Livestock Breeding. An expert group was entrusted in 2002 with the assessment of the submitted projects. Eligible projects are evaluated according to the following criteria: Relevance and goals, reasonable methodical approach and reachable goals, degree of innovation, sustainability as well as breed conservation aims, breed improvement outcomes and cost-benefit ratio. Since 1999, over 43 projects, submitted by recognized breeding organizations, have been financially supported. Thanks to the understanding of partners, a national gene pool for semen of all Swiss cattle breeds has been established with Swissgenetics. This organization has collected semen for over 50 years and has owned and stocked it in its gene bank. Swissgenetics registers all incoming semen and a contract regulates the potential use of core semen. Swissgenetics is also taking care of the storage of goat semen. For horses it has been possible to have access to the existing gene pool in the National Stud. A project has just started to set up a national gene pool for pigs with Suisag as partner, collection and use of core semen are regulated by contract.

Regarding the Global Plan of Action for Animal Genetic Resources adopted in 2007 in Interlaken, Switzerland has reached a lot of strategic priorities of the 4 Priority Areas. The report “SWOT-Analyses for rare breeds originated from Switzerland”, based on the results of the 2011 workshop with breeding organizations and NGOs responsible for rare breeds, identifies immediate and longer term needs for action.

Since Switzerland started its conservation activities long before 2007, the National Plan of Action is an on-going procedure.