

The significance of native animal breeds in the production of traditional food and the transmission of tradition and culture of the region

Summary

Native animal breeds often comprise a point of reference for the old, local traditions, such as production of food and craftsmanship. They play an important role in the protection of the local cultural heritage. Furthermore, local breeds have a remarkable contribution to the preservation of typical rural landscapes, which are historically associated with breeding of these breeds. Nevertheless, close linkages between local breeds and specific traditional products are not so obvious, as the promotion joined with commercialization of a particular food product, directly associated with a certain animal breed is a fairly complicated operation. However, there are examples of the close association of local breeds with traditional products. Noteworthy dairy products include: Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese produced in northern Italy from milk of Reggiana cows; Sicilian cheese Ragusano manufactured from milk of Modicana cows, exquisite French cheese Roquefort, made from milk of Lacaune ewes; and Polish Sheep Cheese “Oscypek” made from milk of Polish Mountain Sheep. In case of meat products, especially noteworthy are Spanish long-maturing hams, including the excellent „*Dehesa de Extremadura*”, *manufactured from meat of Iberian pigs*; and *Welsh beef obtained from Welsh Black and Hereford, which are old cattle breeds*. Local breeds are also closely related to the culture and traditions of local communities. Numerous examples include the Polish Mountain Sheep maintained in the Beskid Mountains, where the tradition of grazing these sheep dates back to the Wallachian shepherds. Hucul horse is another example of such a close connection between native breed and cultural traditions of community. In northern Italy, cows of Valdostana Castana breed are involved in the Battles of the Queens, while Swiss cows of Eringer breed are characterized by an instinctive will to fight for the herd hierarchy. These fights attract thousands of spectators each time. The crucial elements to preserve the native animal breeds to be the gene resources for the future generations are namely, the promotion of regional products, which are manufactured from raw materials derived from local breeds and cultivation of tradition of the region with the participation of these breeds. Such actions are necessary, even indispensable to preserve the biodiversity.

KEY WORDS: local animal breeds / traditional food products / tradition and culture of the region