

## Reclaiming livestock keepers' rights

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At an intergovernmental conference organised by FAO later this year, pastoralists and small-scale livestock keepers will have an opportunity to challenge governments about the perilous situation of their livelihoods, their reduced access to resources and the resulting losses to their livestock breeds. Without their efforts in their grazing territories and on their farms, the world's precious diversity of livestock breeds will disappear. The conference on sustaining livestock breed diversity – similar to the 1996 Leipzig conference on the conservation of crop seed diversity – will be held in Interlaken, Switzerland, 1–7 September 2007.<sup>1</sup>

There is real cause for concern.<sup>2</sup> About 20 per cent of farm animal breeds have been brought to the brink of extinction as world agriculture narrows its focus to those that yield well on high-protein and concentrated energy feeds. One breed is being lost each month, and the globalisation of livestock markets is the biggest single factor hitting farm animal diversity, according to FAO.

Corporations have dramatically increased their control over the livestock industry in recent years. Only two companies now dominate the global supply of day-old chicks for industrial egg production, and four companies supply hatching eggs for broiler production.<sup>3</sup> Consolidation is also occurring between feed suppliers and animal breeding corporations.<sup>4</sup> Those that control livestock genetics are all headquartered in OECD countries.

Hybrid breeding and other closed systems have become standard in poultry and pig breeding, and they are now emerging in sheep and cattle breeding. These trends have the effect of "locking up" genetic resources in the hands of a small number of global players. Corporations are also using patent law to exert control. Monsanto is seeking patents in 160 countries, not only on methods of breeding pigs but also on pig herds and their offspring.<sup>5</sup> Pastoralists and small-scale livestock farmers are already excluded from industrial livestock production, and they are now losing control over their breeds. There is also increasing development of transgenic animals containing patented genes for pharmaceutical and other purposes. In December 2006, the EU agreed a new seven-year 55-billion-euro

research programme, much of which will be on biotechnology and animal genetics.

The result is a food system that is dangerously dependent on a few corporations and a vulnerable, narrowing genetic base, while the broad range of diverse livestock breeds, which have been selected for every production challenge by knowledgeable livestock keepers over millennia, is fast disappearing. There is an urgent need for pastoralists and other livestock keepers to reclaim their rights.

FAO has asked the IPC for food sovereignty (which is a global network of civil societies and social movements concerned with food sovereignty) to facilitate a civil society process with organisations of pastoralists, small-scale livestock keepers and wider civil society in preparation for the Interlaken conference. At the conference they will have a chance to call for recognition of their right to produce their diverse livestock breeds and for measures to protect their food sovereignty. This process will build on work initiated in 2002 at the Forum for Food Sovereignty and further developed at meetings, organised by the League for Pastoral Peoples and others, which resulted in the Karen Commitment to indigenous/pastoralist livestock keepers' rights (2003) and the Bellagio Brief (2006).

In 2007, civil society organisations and social movements will be able to raise these issues at the World Social Forum in Nairobi in January, the Nyéléni World Forum on Food Sovereignty in February, the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (4–8 June), and at a meeting of pastoralists in Spain later that month. They have a chance to call for the implementation of Livestock Keepers' Rights – a bundle of rights that includes rights to grazing, water, markets and participation in policy decision making as well as rights to the genetic resources of their animals.

However, at the recent meeting of the FAO intergovernmental technical working group on animal genetic resources in December, which was preparing the Interlaken conference, FAO member states missed a major opportunity to agree on steps to secure livestock keepers' rights. In their reviews of the state of animal

genetic resources, many countries had noted that globalisation and perverse incentives promoting industrial livestock production were the main economic reasons for the loss of breeds and a few governments voiced these concerns. For example, some suggested text that would prohibit the patenting of animal genes.

But most of the debate was dominated by the US, Canada, and Australia, countries that have few indigenous breeds, and the EU. They are all represented in a committee of about a dozen countries, chaired by the US, which will redraft a paper on strategic priorities for action. This paper will be negotiated by the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture in June, before being submitted to the Interlaken conference for agreement.

Unless governments challenge the power imbalance in production in favour of pastoralists and small-scale livestock keepers, livestock breeds will continue to be lost at an alarming rate.

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1 In preparation, FAO will publish the "State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture" and, at the conference, governments will agree "Strategic Priorities for Action". First drafts on the FAO website. See:  
<http://tinyurl.com/y35n6u>  
<http://tinyurl.com/y47bkg>  
<http://tinyurl.com/y3zfzg>

2 For more in depth analysis of the issues see: S. Gura (2003) *Losing livestock, losing livelihoods*.  
<http://www.grain.org/seedling/?id=220>

3 I. Koehler-Rollefson (2006) "Concentration in the poultry sector".  
<http://tinyurl.com/ydczcs>

4 Nutreco, based in the Netherlands, is Europe's largest animal compound feed and fish feed producer and it also has a breeding division, Euribrid, which comprises Hypor, the world's second largest pig breeding company, Hybrid, the world's second largest turkey breeding company, and Hybro, the world's fourth largest broiler breeder. See: S. Gura (2006) "Concentration in the livestock breeding industry", <http://tinyurl.com/t6fg2>

5 Greenpeace (2005) *Monsanto files patent for new invention: the pig*.  
<http://tinyurl.com/yynrgx>

