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## EDITORIAL

The fact that this Bulletin has been under way for a number of years is in itself an indication that the future of the world's animal genetic resources is regarded as a serious issue in FAO. In fact, concern for the genetic heritage of our domestic livestock is to be found in programmes going back almost to the beginning of the Organization. So the subject is not new. However, there is now a heightened awareness that a new level of commitment is required. This is partly because we are all sensitized by the global debate on depletion of genetic resources, be they in plants, wild or domesticated animals, or indeed in whole eco-systems. It is also a reflection of the rapid changes, and pressures for change, which now confront the livestock populations in many developing countries.

Difficult choices are faced by livestock farmers and governmental authorities throughout the developing world. The urgent need to increase productivity is paramount almost everywhere. At the same time, there is increasing evidence that simply replacing local breeds or strains with apparently superior stock from elsewhere in the world is not always the answer. In some cases, introduction of exotic stock has led to great disappointment. Furthermore, particularly where extensive cross-breeding has been practiced, the local genetic resources have been greatly diluted, and sometimes their integrity has been compromised beyond recall.

The need therefore is to balance the requirements of development and conservation. Quite often, they can go hand in hand. A locally adapted breed, which has perhaps in the past not been selected for productivity, may find itself steadily losing ground as the demands for efficiency increase. In such a case, the survival of the local breed is best guaranteed by improving its productivity through selection from within, while at the same time improving the nutrition and husbandry circumstances which make its production system competitive.

To address this problem in a comprehensive and coherent way, FAO has recently put together a Global Animal Genetic Resources Programme. It includes some current activities, but for the most part it sets reasonable but ambitious targets for action over the next five years. The Programme has five main elements.

- Completion of the first world inventory of breeds and strains of domestic livestock.
- Establishment of conservation and improvement programmes in at least 12 key breeds around the world.
- Where appropriate, the development of facilities for long-term storage of semen or embryos.
- Exploitation of the developing DNA technology to underpin conservation programme.
- The establishment of a framework of international agreements on matters of equity, access, patenting and related issues as they affect Animal Genetic Resources.

FAO is committing some US\$ 3 million of its existing resources to establish this programme. Its full implementation over five years will require an additional US\$ 15 million. This programme is the first coherent attempt to address these questions on a global basis. It is the task whose time has come.