

A stakeholder view on fair and equitable exchange of AnGR, a government perspective
URUGUAY: A FOOD-EXPORTING COUNTRY

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Country description

Uruguay is a country located in the South-Eastern part of South America that has a land border with Brazil in the North and East. To the West, the Uruguay River sets the limits with Argentina while to South-West lies the estuary of Río de la Plata and to Southeast lies the Atlantic Ocean.

With 176,214 km² of continental land, Uruguay is part of a temperate bioclimatic region which also includes the South of Brazil and the West of Argentina. The landscape features rolling plains and low hill with fertile valleys. This region is especially suitable for livestock grazing systems included in production systems that combine pastures and crops with high biological and economic efficiency.

Uruguay is a multiparty presidential representative democratic republic with three separate branches of government. The President of Uruguay is both the head of state and the head of government, subject to legislative and judicial checks. The electorate exercised sovereignty directly through elections, initiatives, or referendums. Approximately, 3.5 million of inhabitants live in the country, half of them living in the capital city, Montevideo, which is also the capital of MERCOSUR.

The importance of the agriculture

More than 90 % of the land is used in agriculture and livestock activities, which contribute roughly 10 to 12% to the country's GDP and explains around 70 % of exports. The production systems are exposed to international commodity prices which press them to be efficient and competitive for accessing to the international markets. In this sense, Uruguay's agriculture has relatively low inputs and the main proportion of animal production is based only on pastures allowing marketing its products as "natural" or "organic" products.

In 2011, 400 years from the introduction of the first heads of cattle by Spanish settlers will be celebrated, as well as 200 years of independence from the Kingdom of Spain. From that time to present, the livestock sector has played a central role in the economy. With 11.7 million of cattle and 8.7 of sheep, beef meat and wool were traditionally the most important export products of the country. In recent decades, the dairy sector evolved from supplying the domestic market to export more than 60 % of the milk produced and recently, forestry and crops raise similar importance in exports.

The AnGR Country Report: Priorities defined

The first country report on farm animal genetic resources established the aim of increasing the potential of the animal genetic resources to produce high quality products, health and safety food maintaining sustainable production systems in the medium and long term. "Sustainable" implies the social, economic and environment dimensions.

To achieve this goal, the report emphasizes the following areas:

- a) To promote more coordination in the production chains.
- b) To maintain a strong work in animal health.
- c) To implement information systems based on the national individual identification system of livestock.
- d) To strengthen of human resources and institutional capacities.
- e) To Develop proper improvement strategies for national production systems considering their specific characteristics (e.g. low inputs, based on pastures).
- f) To conserve effectively the current biodiversity of the animal genetic resources of the country.

At international level, the report defines the following priorities:

- a) To promote regional harmonization, especially in animal health policies and in projects to improve and promote the regional gene pool.
- b) To promote active interaction with other regions in order to develop strategies that combine harmoniously business goals, animal health and maintenance of animal genetic biodiversity.

Access and use of genetic resources

The country has developed a set of laws and regulations governing aspects of general interest even in a framework of respect for private ownership of land and natural resources found therein. Since 1935 the country has a specific law and regulations on the access and protection of fauna and flora, in 1993 CBD was adopted and, in 2000, a law defining a National System of Protected Areas with the objective of preserving special ecosystems was approved. In that sense, Government offices are in charge of coordinating the activities related with the national inventory of fauna, proposing regulatory measures for sustainable use of species in the wild and in captivity. At the same time, they are responsible of studying and proposing measures for the conservation of threatened wildlife species.

More specifically, in the case of farm animal genetic resources, specific regulation on access does not exist but their use and the activities developed with them, commercial and not commercial, are intensively regulated or controlled. The set of laws and regulations address four basic dimensions that are related to safety of products: animal welfare & health, labour issues, environment & natural resources. Moreover, other regulations exist that involve commercial aspects, animal diseases and technical requirements. For example, in this sense, in 2006, the National Animal Identification System was defined as compulsory for cattle and, two

years later, a complementary regulation that follow each animal inside the slaughterhouse through seven different check points which send real time information to the servers of the official institution in charge of this area was approved.

Recently, DNA banks have been created with the participation of breeder associations, the National Institute of Agricultural Research and the University of the Republic. The protocol for regulating the access and use of the biological material and the information associated with it is still in construction. This kind of agreement is created to give a framework to promote research and ensure a wide sharing of the potential benefits from the developments obtained by the participation of the public technical institutions.

Fair and equitable benefit sharing

The agri-business plays a central role in the country's economy. The international demand for food and the increase in the international prices of the products promote strong change in the structure of the production system. More intensive use of the natural resources, more technology applied to the production process, an increase in the price of the land are some of changes observed under the new scenario. In this context, the Government's concerns are related with the sustainable use of natural resources and with avoiding social exclusion in the economic development. In a formal economy, in general, but even more in the case of agri-business, the benefit sharing has been made through the tax system. Different kinds of instruments are used. In some cases, there are agreements among all the actors of the agri-industrial chain to apply taxes that distribute equitably cost and benefit inside the chain itself.

The farmer and breeder organizations have an active and real participation in different levels in all the matters related with farm animal genetic resources that ensures a good balance in the discussion about benefit sharing. Despite this, the government has an important role in the negotiations to ensure transparency and fair access to international markets for farmer production.

Conclusions

The agriculture has a central role in the country's economy. The general concept applied related with farm animal genetic resources has been "utilization for conservation". Regulations on the use of animal genetic resources and tax systems are used as tools to share the benefits obtained by the use of them. The participation of the livestock stakeholders at different levels of the decision-making process related with farm animal genetic resources seeks to ensure equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of the farm animal resources.

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