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## NEWS ITEMS

### STRAIN DIFFERENCES IN TRYPANOTOLERANCE AMONG BORAN CATTLE

Boran cattle from East Africa, in common with other *Bos indicus* breeds are believed to be susceptible to trypanosomiasis, in contrast to the West African *Bos taurus* breeds such as the N'Dama or the West African Shorthorn. Recent work has, however, shown that there are strain differences within the Boran breed in trypanotolerance. A Boran type bred by the orma tribe in Kenya has shown markedly superior tolerance to tsetse fly challenge when compared in the same environment with an improved Boran strain. The Orma type of Boran not only had a lower trypanosomiasis infection rate, but infected animals also suffered less from anaemia and mortality. This interesting observation may lead to possibilities of cattle production using the larger *Bos indicus* strains in the tsetse infected humid zones of Africa, an area that is underutilized in terms of large ruminant production.

### HYBRIDS OF GAUR AND DOMESTIC CAME

The gaur (*Bos gaurus*) is an inhabitant of the hill forests of the Indian peninsula. Successful crossing of the gaur with domestic cattle has taken place accidentally in a government farm in southern Malaysia into which a male gaur had strayed from the adjoining jungle. The discovery that the gaur had bred some of the cows was made when calves were born that were different from the usual types obtained. The growth rate of the hybrid calves up to six months of age was nearly 70 percent greater than normal calves. In addition, the hybrids had extra muscling in the hind quarters, a trait most likely inherited from the gaur. The females have a diploid chromosome complement of 62 and therefore it is likely that at least the females should be fertile. Other traits of the gaur that may be exploited to advantage are possibly those associated with hardiness and disease resistance. The gaur is an endangered species with the population in the world amounting to only a few thousand animals. Hybridization may therefore offer a means of conserving the useful qualities of this breed. (Adapted from *Ceres* 105: No. 3)

### INTEREST IN SOUTH AMERICAN CAMELIDS

Increasing interest is being shown in Peru in increasing the number of llamas (*Lama glama*) and alpacas (*Lama pacos*). The two species are well adapted to survival in the highlands. They have soft, padded feet which do not break the ground like a sheep's hooves and they make very efficient use of the extremely poor highland forage. The long, fine wool of the alpacas is highly prized by the textile industry. Llamas are a good source of wool, meat and milk. Their hides have a variety of uses and even the faeces are useful, providing a source of energy in the mountainous areas. The local people are being encouraged to adopt proper weaning and culling practices and to use shears instead of knives for shearing. These practices have helped to increase the productivity of llamas from 30-40 young/female in 1970 to 60-70 at present. A further impetus to the raising of these animals may follow from the interest being shown by other countries to raise them. New Zealand has decided to import these animals from Canada and the United Kingdom and is presently studying animal health conditions to be met by importers.

Recognizing the international importance of these camelids, Peru has recently established a Scientific Information Centre on South American Camelidae with headquarters at the Research Centre of Veterinary Research Institute for Tropical and High Altitude Research, Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, University of Lima, P.O. Box 4270, Lima, Peru. Its purpose is to serve as an information and documentation centre on these species of animals to interested persons within and outside the region. The centre will welcome scientific material and other information from those working on the South American camelids.

## FERAL GOATS ARE NOT A NUISANCE

The contempt for feral goats in New Zealand has disappeared with the recognition of potential benefit from these animals. It has been found that about 80 percent of these animals have mohair and cashmere which are much more valuable commercially than sheep's wool. Top grade cashmere can fetch more than \$80 a kilo and in addition, there is currently a worldwide boom for mohair.

Fibre is, however, not the only reason for the feral goat's popularity. These animals have been observed to thrive in areas infested with a shrub called "gorse" which is difficult to eradicate. This woody legume, shunned by other animals, is liked by goats and as a result, farmers have found it advantageous to have mixed farms of sheep and goats. Not only do the goats provide extra income but by clearing the land of gorse, they also increase the grazing area for sheep.

## RARE BREED CENSUS IN THE USA

The American Minor Breeds Conservancy (AMBC), a non-profit group based in Pittsboro, North Carolina has recently published the results of a comprehensive census of Canadian and U.S. livestock breeds. It reported that about 80 of American 160 livestock breeds and 25 of its 60 major poultry breeds are endangered. In order to develop a comprehensive list of livestock breeds and identify those that are in danger of extinction, a Rare Breeds Rescue Programme was also launched. To qualify or inclusion as an endangered breed in this progr, the breed must have been recognized in North America at least since the turn of the century or represent a breed which has a small genetic base worldwide. Such minor breeds have been classified into four categories depending on the number of individual registrations per year. Definition of these four categories are as follows:

**Watch:** Breeds whose registrations over a 25 year period have shown a steady decline or where registrations are less than 5000 per year.

**Minor:** Cattle, sheep, goat and horse breeds with less than 1000 registrations per year. Pig breeds with less than 200 registrations per year.

**Feral:** Stocks known to have been running wild for at least 100 years with no known introductions of outside blood.

**Rare:** Cattle and horse breeds with less than 200 registrations per year. Sheep, goat and pig breeds with less than 500 registrations per year.

Among the cattle breeds classified as "rare" is the milking Devon that arrived in the New World with the Pilgrims in the 17th century. However, Texas Longhorn cattle that were considered endangered some years ago are now not even in the "watch" category. There were only two herds about 15 years ago, but with the "rediscovery" of the breed for its adaptability to the Texas plains, it has now increased in number considerably.

one of the interesting pig breeds that is seriously endangered with only two herds of 30 sows is the Carolina mule-foot hog whose single hoof on each foot makes it adaptable to concrete floors that cause soreness among other breeds. The Tamworth breed has also decreased in numbers to warrant inclusion in the "Minor" category.

The AMBC has argued that, unlike European countries, the US does not have a national programme to conserve rare breeds of livestock. It has therefore urged that as a beginning, a national semen bank for rare breeds be established which should later complement a national strategy of conservation of live populations.