EDITORIAL

Identifying and characterizing breeds of livestock is the first unavoidable step of any programme aiming at conserving Domestic Animal Diversity. For this, FAO has for many years developed a Global Database, first established at Hannover University, then, after 1992, moved to Rome, and named the Global Data Bank for Animal Genetic Resources (GDB-AGR). The various solutions used to collect and enter data in this GDB-AGR have been described in AGRI 11 by J. Ruane. Using these data has led to the World Watch List, now published and available, and which is described in this issue (see paper by R. Loftus, p 3).

During the year between these two papers the number of entries has been increased, the total number of breeds from 2047 to 2719, of which 53 % are with population data, as opposed to 38 % one year ago. This first phase has been the result of the Global breed survey implemented with support from UNEP, and using the software developed by the Hannover University based EAAP Data Bank. We consider that the time has come for a new development of this activity. As indicated in the previous editorial, a working group has been constituted to propose a new structure for the GDBAGR. The report will soon be available. Apart from using new and more user friendly softwâre, the new structure will develop a network between the central node at FAO Headquarters, regional nodes operated by regional coordinators, and national nodes collecting and validating the data. The use of new communication media, such as electronic mail, will allow for real interactions between all these levels, even if, for security reasons, only the central node will have the possibility to enter data in the database.

The report from the previous working group on genetic distancing has been reprinted and is available on request.

The next step will be “action”. Action to promote and improve local breeds identified as being particularly valuable, but also action to preserve weaker breeds before they disappear. From the data available, we can say that 390 breeds are at risk, by which is meant that the total population is less than 1000 breeding females. The old debate between supporters of *in situ* and *ex situ* preservation is not closed. However it is clear that something must be done, even if the optimal solution still has to be defined: as shown by R. Loftus, one breed of livestock disappears every week.

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