

FAO International Technical Conference on Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture Interlaken, 4 September 2007

Welcoming address by

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The spoken word is definitive

**DIVERSITY NOT UNIFORMITY:
THE GENETIC MATERIAL OF RARE BREEDS IS AN IMPORTANT
RESOURCE OF THE FUTURE**

Excellencies,
Madame Federal Councillor,
Mister Assistant Director-General,
Mister Executive Secretary,
Mister Chairman,
Dear Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am delighted, and it is a great honour for me, to welcome you on behalf of the Government (= Executive Council) of the Canton of Berne to the first FAO international technical conference on animal genetic resources.

The organisers of the event have put together a fascinating programme, for which I would like to extend my warmest thanks to everyone concerned at the FAO and the Swiss Federal office for Agriculture. The authorities of the Canton of Berne are delighted that so many prominent people and experts from more than 160 countries all over the world have gathered here in Interlaken.

The Canton of Berne is the second biggest canton in Switzerland, not only in terms of its area but also in terms of its population and economic strength. Our annual net

aggregate income is approximately CHF 44 billion, or 11% of that of Switzerland as a whole.

The Canton of Berne is also the country's biggest agricultural canton. Between a fifth and a quarter of all agricultural activity in Switzerland takes place here. So it is no surprise that our canton also has much to offer in the area of animal genetic resources.

Because of its climatic and topographic conditions, animal husbandry has always played a major role in the Canton of Berne. The Bernese Oberland also has a lot to offer in terms of the theme of the conference, being as it is the home of

- the original Simmental,
- the Black-Brown mountain sheep and
- the Saanen and Brienz goats.

The Canton of Berne is – and traditionally always has been – committed to a sustainable, low-resource agricultural policy. That is one of the reasons why these breeds have gained an international reputation.

In the light of the rapid pace of change in general agricultural conditions, we are well aware of the urgent need to place breeds such as these on the Red List.

So we are extremely interested in concepts that can help prevent such developments. Diversity in animal genetic resources is essential if we are to master the agricultural issues and challenges that lie ahead. I am thinking, for example, of the question of how to feed the world's population in the face of climate change.

We have a saying in German: "*Erhalten ist schwerer als erwerben*", (To preserve is more difficult than to acquire). It is very difficult to preserve the genetic material of rare breeds of domesticated animals. And once genetic material is lost, it is lost forever. This is a great challenge to you, the experts – but also to society and politicians as well. I would therefore like to thank the organisers of this event for giving us the opportunity to discuss these issues.

Strategic decisions on managing animal genetic resources in the future are crucial for the quality of life of future generations. That is why it is so important to debate them.

I wish you much success at the conference and a pleasant stay in the Bernese Oberland. Thank you.