

Heifer Conducts Side Event in First International Technical Conference on Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

Heifer International is an NGO whose mission is to work with communities to end hunger and poverty and care for the earth. Heifer's projects in some 50 countries around the world are working with small scale farm families by providing good quality local livestock and training. Heifer has a strong gender equity focus and emphasis on agro-ecology and use of local resources. Project groups are trained in enterprise development in order to improve and grow their livestock business.

Heifer International hosted one side event during the International Technical Conference entitled "Breed Conservation through Livestock Development".

1. The first presentation was from Dr. Terry Wollen, Director of Animal Well-Being on topic "**Heifer International: Promoting Local Breeds in Community Development**". Dr. Wollen talked about the way Heifer projects promote and preserve local breeds of animal from around the Heifer world. Highlighted were the Bali cattle in Indonesia, Furioso-North Star horses in Romania, several local breeds of cattle, sheep and goats in Zimbabwe, and the Churro Sheep of the Navajo in the Southwest US. His presentation was concluded with the benefits of having local breeds in the communities.
2. Dr. Raul Perezgrovas Garza from University of Chiapas, Mexico spoke on the "**Role of Local Peoples in the Conservation and Improvement of Local Animal Breeds**". Local people are the powerful tool to protect and preserve local breeds of animal rather than external intervention. Women and children are a vital part of the conservation of local animals which is achieved through participatory approaches and through the inclusion of conservation education in school curricula. He cited several examples of conservation strategies being used by local and indigenous people from around the globe. Agencies like FAO can only achieve their global action plan on Animal Genetic resources through the participatory and bottom-up approach.
3. The third Speaker of the event was Professor D. Phillip Sponenberg from the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine, Virginia, who talked about "**Real World Breed Conservation**". Dr. Sponenberg also represents the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy. His presentation focused on basics of breeds, their evolution and relevant examples, which helped the audience understand the science of animal breeds. Breeders/owners of animals gave us the breeds and they can conserve them. They are the key decision makers. Outsiders are only the helpers and can guide and educate the public and others how to conserve and protect them. His theme of presentation were:
 - breeds must ideally meet market demands

- Traditional breeds may need short term assistance to assure their continuation
- NGOs can successfully play this role
- Wise action is needed to save breeds, save their role, and not change them in the process

After the presentation, several pertinent issues on animal breeds and diversity were discussed. There was good interaction among the presenters and audience. Most of the experts pointed to the loss of diversity of animals due to high yielding breeds of five major types of livestock. Subsidies have caused problem to the farmers and technological changes have also threatened the conservation of genetic diversity of animals. Several participants complimented Heifer International's work with locally adapted breeds of animals in community development. There were several requests to expand Heifer's activities in the countries where Heifer does not have a program. Educating people and using appropriate techniques for promoting local breeds are the best solution to conserve animal biodiversity.

For information, please contact:

Terry S. Wollen, D.V.M.

Director of Animal Well-Being

Heifer International

1 World Avenue

Little Rock, AR 72202

USA

Terry.wollen@heifer.org

www.heifer.org

Attachment: Wollen PowerPoint; Sponenberg PowerPoint; Perezgrovas PowerPoint

Attachment: Speaker pictures