

PRESERVATION OF RARE BREEDS IN AUSTRIA

CONSERVACION DE RAZAS AUTOCTONAS EN AUSTRIA

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SUMMARY

Our private Association for the Preservation of Rare Breeds was founded seven years ago with the aim to support our natural variety. Today we have 300 members in Austria, who assist us with their money and unpaid help. We also cooperate with neighbour institutions in whole Europe and recently have published our own magazin ARCHE - news for variety - with a 5000 copies tirage.

RESUMEN

Nuestra asociación privada para la conservación de las razas autóctonas fue fundada hace 7 años con ánimo de apoyar la variedad natural. Tiene en Austria 300 miembros, que la asisten con dinero y otras ayudas y coopera con instituciones similares en Europa. Publica su propia revista ARCHE - news for variety que edita 5000 ejemplares.

In a terrible way more and more domestic animal breeds get decimated and stamped out. With that, man arrives faster and faster at the limit of his breeding possibilities. Our organization, the Verein Zur Erhaltung Gefährdeter Haustierrassen (Association

for the Preservation of Rare Breeds) in Austria tries to save rare breeds and to find breeders, who work together with us.

In 1948 there were 35 different bovine races in Austria, but today we have only 7. These alarming facts should inspire a reflection, because they concern nearly all domestic animals bred by mankind. For example, 96,5% of all layer hens used in Europe come from only four (!) of the big producing firms, so that we can just talk about four artificially bred races. The four most widespread pig breeds in Germany (Deutsche Landrasse, Deutsches Edelschwein, Pietrain, Belgier) came to 99,3% of all stud-book animals in 1984 (in Austria the situation is similar). We could continue the list without any problems, because the standardization of domestic animal breeds has reached a never known dimension. The reasons for that are multifarious, but always exactly planned by the breeder. By crossbreeding, a breed is genetically changed until it

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meets the claim of the breeder. But often the original gets displaced by the crossed-in breed and finally disappears forever. Sometimes there are just formalities like more than two horns or an eye-catching pigmentation that please the breeder or impress his environment. It also happens, that certain pigmentations are associated with special qualities. That's mostly only wishful thinking, but nevertheless serves to the standardization of domestic animal breeds.

Another reason is without any doubt the increasing industrialization, that had many consequences for the agriculture. The farmer, who once was solely self-supporter, now became a food-producer, who had to accommodate to the needs of the growing population respectively the industry. That caused a specialization on one-sided efficiency of breeds, that yielded certain products (for example milk, meat etc.)

But user's habits can change very fast and we could watch that in second half of our century. After the Second World War fat pigs were extraordinary popular, while in the recent years the trend goes more and more to lean meat. Old breeds, once very popular, that are concerned by this development, are decimated either by cross-breeding or by giving up of the breeding and are condemned to become extinct. After all we must not forget, that through legislation and through modern means in breeding (artificial insemination, embryo-transfer etc.) breeders of large populations are preferred extremely. That's why many breeders have no other

choice than to support indirectly the spreading of conventional breeds.

But why is it so important, that just small, often already uneconomic populations are preserved for the future?

The famous professor for animal husbandry and author of numerous publications, Dr. Hans Hinrich Sambras mentions one reason, that should be sufficient to support the preservation of the variety. He says, that each domestic animal breed is a cultural asset, that should be protected and must not be destroyed. The preservation of nature and animal world should be at least as important as the saving of objects d'art in our museums. Of course not only on photographs, but alive!

But there are also important economical and social reasons: With each exterminated breed or plant the evolutionary experience of this form of life - accumulated in the genes - is lost forever. And even when single individuals of one breed survive in zoos or in botanical gardens: only a fraction of genetic variety is preserved and besides that fraction is more or less frozen in a changing environment.

If new and unknown diseases threaten genetic more or less identical bovine or pig races, breeders cannot cross in resistance genes for lack of genetic variability. The consequences could be losses of milliards in the industrial nations and at the worst additional famines in the Third World. It is well possible, that certain abilities of old breeds like stress resistance, robustness, good feed utilization and modesty, which seem unimportant at the moment, get important for the

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breeder in the future. And if the trend to quality continues, consumers will be willing to spend more money for natural and highly nutritive food. Especially with regard to the European Community it is absolutely necessary to do some rethinking better today than tomorrow. Because once the austrian market is dominated by the large european *agricultural factories*, it will be difficult to stand one's ground with conventional products. Old domestic animal breeds present themselves because of their excellent qualities and therefore are of immediate interest.

If man arrives at the limit of his breeding possibilities, it might be too late for alternatives. So it is important

*to preserve living gene-reserves, who are able to adapt to their environment, like they have done until today. Only then the slogan **old but still useful** gets a chance to stand the test.*

PRESENT PROJECTS:

- Carinthian Brillenschafe in den Karawanken,
- Crainer Steinschafe in the alps,
- Carinthian Blondvieh
- Original Pinzgauer Vieh,
- Gemsfärbige Gebirgsziegen,
- Schwarzhalsziegen in National-parks,
- Wollhaarige Weideschweine,
- Schwäbisch-Hällische Schweine,
- Geflügelrassen (Poultry).