

DOMESTIC CATTLE BREED DIVERSITY IN LITHUANIA

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Summary. Economical liberalisation, which started in 1989, led to a dramatic decrease of cattle numbers in Lithuania. From 1989 to 1995 the number of cattle decreased by about 50 % and the local native cattle breeds became a status of endangered breeds. International breeding programmes have intensified the economic competition among breeds. The promotion and facilitation of using a few universal breeds for dairy and beef production has led to the replacement of less productive breeds with more productive ones and increased the number of endangered breeds globally. However, traditional native cattle breeds are often well adapted to local environment, animal husbandry practices and feeding; the breeds can have resistance to local diseases and are important from historical point of view. To change this situation, more attention is currently focused on the maintenance of animal genetic diversity than in the past, and activities have been initiated on scientific, political and administrative levels. The N-EURO-CAD project, funded by Nordic Genebank for Farm Animals (NGH), was designed to analyse genetic diversity within North European, Baltic and Polish cattle breeds, to estimate relationships and genetic distances between them by using genetic markers. The results of studies will give better picture on the origin and relationships between North European, Baltic and Polish cattle breeds and their history, will promote preservation of endangered cattle breeds and conservation of cattle genetic resources. The studies on the origin of cattle breeds also can give more information on history and migration of human populations.

Keywords: cattle, conservation, diversity, livestock.