

# NSC FAnGR News

Newsletter of the UK National Standing Committee on Farm Animal Genetic Resources

Issue 1, July 2009

## Introduction and welcome

With over 130 native breeds, the UK has one of the richest Farm Animal Genetic Resources (FAnGR) in the western world. These breeds and strains, and the variability within them, are of great economic, social and cultural importance. For these reasons alone it is important that we care for them. Additionally, we have national and international obligations to do so. Also, there are imported breeds that have major economic significance in the UK, and we need to ensure their future 'genetic health'.

We already have a strong tradition of caring for our FAnGR in the UK – thanks largely to the activities of individual breeders, breed societies, charities and non-governmental organisations. However, the threat to our FAnGR is growing, for a variety of reasons, including the spread of relatively few, specialised breeds, economic pressures on primary producers, and the appearance of a number of exotic diseases.

For these reasons, there has been increasing activity in relevant UK Government and Devolved Administration departments, working with the industry, to help co-ordinate efforts to manage our FAnGR. These have included:

- Publication of the **UK Country Report on Farm Animal Genetic Resources**

<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/010/a1250e/annexes/CountryReports/UK.pdf>

in 2002 by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), with contributions from the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD), the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Northern Ireland (DARDNI) and the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) - this was the United Kingdom's official contribution to the FAO's **First Report on the State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources** published in 2007 as part of FAO's Global Strategy <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/010/a1250e/a1250e.pdf>

- Formation of a **UK National Steering Committee on Farm Animal Genetic Resources** in 2003, which oversaw:
- Publication of the **UK National Action Plan on Farm Animal Genetic Resources** (in November 2006) <http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/livestock/strategy/genetic-res/pdf/fangr-actionplan.pdf>
- Formation of a **UK National Standing Committee (NSC) on Farm Animal Genetic Resources** in 2007, to help implement the Plan, and provide advice on FAnGR matters to Government and industry.

We are launching this Newsletter, just over a year after the new Standing Committee first met – future issues will provide a regular update on our activities. I hope that you find it useful, and we welcome feedback and suggestions via the Secretariat, whose details are given at the end of the Newsletter.

**Prof Geoff Simm, Chair, National Standing Committee on Farm Animal Genetic Resources**

---

### **NSC FAnGR webpages launched**

The NSC FAnGR webpages on Defra's website went live in May 2009 – please visit: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/fangr/>

The webpages have information on:

- The remit and membership of the NSC
  - Progress in implementing the 38 Recommended Actions in the National Action Plan
  - The work of the four sub-groups of the committee relating to:
    - Identification, Monitoring & Characterisation (IMC);
    - Conservation & Sustainable Use (CSU);
    - Education & Communication (E&C);
    - Research & Development (R&D).
  - Links to other key FAnGR stakeholders and reports
  - More information about FAnGR research in progress
  - Details of current research funding opportunities
  - Forthcoming conferences and events relevant to FAnGR
- 

### **Progress in implementing Recommended Actions in the National Action Plan**

Highlights of progress in the 4 key areas in which the NSC operates are given below – for full details, please visit our website.

#### **Identification, Monitoring & Characterisation**

- Linking the UK National Breed Inventory to the European Farm Animal Biodiversity Information System (EFABIS). Links have been established also with European and FAO DAD-IS databases: <http://dad.fao.org/> <http://efabis.tzv.fal.de/>  
Electronic uploads are being piloted with sheep data.
- Working with a wide range of 'data owners' or umbrella organisations to encourage regular provision of electronic data. A workshop is planned with stakeholders in 2009 to discuss data availability and formats, and steps to encourage regular electronic updates.
- Working with other stakeholders to agree, where possible, a single list of breed names with country of origin (sometimes there are conflicting views), and hence whether native or exotic, and a single agreed list of breeds at risk, including correcting some omissions in the National Country Report. We expect this to be achieved by the end of 2009.

#### **Conservation & Sustainable Use**

- Developing recommendations on risk management in mainstream breeds for publication later this year.
- Initiating discussions with animal health officials on the possibility of

extending the 'Breeds at Risk Register' originally produced to help protect FAnGR during the 2000/01 foot and mouth disease outbreak, to help protect FAnGR of all livestock species in the event of other exotic disease outbreaks.

- Initiating regular dialogue with the Farm Animal Welfare Council to ensure a joined up approach to issues of mutual interest.

### **Education & Communication**

- Drafting a communication plan, and beginning to enact it via the launch of our website and this Newsletter;
- Publicising 'success stories' relating to conservation and sustainable use of FAnGR;
- Identifying education resources on FAnGR for **use in schools, colleges and universities**, as part of taught courses, or via distance learning.

### **Research & Development**

Several Government-funded research projects have been launched which directly or indirectly support Recommended Actions in the National Action Plan, including:

Defra-funded studies please see the R+D section on our website for information on these projects:

- Geographical concentration of some native sheep breeds which has developed methods to measure concentration, to help identify breeds at risk as a result of this.
- A review of molecular characterisation studies on UK;

- A review of breed and within-breed genetic differences in nutrient utilisation;
- A project examining the scope for incorporating environmental objectives in ruminant livestock breeding goals; and
- A project examining the potential role of genomic selection in beef and sheep breeding, and the need for a ruminant Genetic Improvement Network to help achieve environmentally sustainable breeding of ruminants.

The Genesis Faraday Partnership recently launched an Industry Club on inherited diseases in farm livestock. This will produce guidelines on dealing with single gene disorders

[www.genesis-faraday.org](http://www.genesis-faraday.org)

### **Latest news from ERFp**



ERFP  
NEWSLETTER\_issue6

### **Contact details (secretariat)**

NSC FAnGR Secretariat  
Area 5A  
9 Millbank  
c/o Nobel House  
17 Smith Square  
London  
SW1P 3JR  
Telephone: (0) 20 7238 4946  
Email: [fangr@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:fangr@defra.gsi.gov.uk)