



NSC FAnGR News

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

Issue 3, July 2010

Introduction

Welcome to the third of this series of NSC FAnGR newsletters, and the first to appear in 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity (IYB). The NSC is pleased to be a partner in this initiative (see <http://www.biodiversityislife.net/?q-home> for more details.) A quick viewing of the IYB website shows that most attention is focussed on 'wild' biodiversity – perhaps understandable, as it is more accessible to many. However, all of us interested in biodiversity in farmed species have an opportunity, this year above all others, to raise the profile of 'farmed' biodiversity. Biodiversity is recognised internationally as being important in its own right. But, for those of a more pragmatic bent, given the challenges of feeding a dramatically growing global population, and doing so in a changing climate, the issue has never been more relevant.

Much of the work of the NSC is 'behind the scenes' offering advice to UK Government and Devolved

Administration advisers in a range of departments, and interacting with other advisory and industry bodies. Through this work the NSC has helped to increased awareness of key FAnGR issues. Highlights of this work since our last Newsletter are given below, and include discussions on protecting FAnGR in the event of an outbreak of a notifiable disease, reporting on poultry breeding structures in the UK, harmonising lists of breeds at risk used by different stakeholders, surveying support mechanisms used to help in conservation and sustainable use of FAnGR across the EU, and providing advice on honey bee genetic resources.

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

Progress in implementing Recommended Actions in the National Action Plan

A brief update on work progress of the four sub-groups of the committee is given below.

Please visit our website for more information on the NSC and its work, for an update on progress on Recommended Actions in the UK National Action Plan on FAnGR, and links to other sites of FAnGR interest: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/fangr/>

Identification, Monitoring and Characterisation

Over the last few months the IMC working group has been working on:

- The establishment of a monitoring system;
- The definition of geographical endemism; and
- The use of the Breeds at Risk Register for control of epidemics.

In each case our proposals are being considered by others and we expect to have feedback soon.

Conservation and Sustainable Use

Over the past few months the CSU group has made progress on several important fronts. A major achievement has been the agreement with Defra and Animal Health on the measures which would be put in place to protect valuable genetic resources in the event of an outbreak of a notifiable

disease in the UK. We have pressed for the official strategy in disease outbreaks to be applied in the same way across all farmed species and all notifiable disease. This has now been agreed. A further important decision has been to recognise that a single animal on a holding should be accorded protection if it meets the other criteria for doing so, rather than setting a population threshold for these measures.

Considerable progress has been made on the harmonisation of the lists of breeds which are eligible for protection or support measures across all the species. This has enabled new definitive lists to be issued by Natural England for the breeds covered by their various environmental schemes. Work has continued to develop robust criteria for the calculation of population numbers and how these relate to conservation measures.

All the poultry breed organisations in the UK have now been consulted in connection with a report on the structure of poultry keeping in this country and the relative population strengths of the many distinct breeds known to be present. A first draft of the report has been considered by NSC and the final text is in preparation, this report will be posted on the FAnGR website shortly.

An important new area of activity has been initiated as a result of an enquiry by the Scottish Government on issues relating to the conservation of the genetic resources of farmed Honey Bees, a species which had previously not been included in the work of NSC.

Education and Communication

Cascading the objectives and outputs of the NSC and information on Farm Animals genetics continues to be a priority for the group. Recent work includes:

- A FAnGR leaflet has been finalised and will be published shortly, this leaflet promotes and highlights the work of the NSC
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/fangr/documents/fangr-leaflet.pdf>
- An 'activity grid' is being developed to summarise the work completed and highlight future events.
- Articles on breeds at risk from the 'Ark' publication have been referenced and linked to the FAnGR website.
- A new discussion paper on training has been produced; this will go on the website shortly.

At the NSC meeting in Belfast in March 2010, the NSC took the opportunity to meet the key Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Policy Leads to update them on NSC activity and examine how FAnGR aims and objectives can be incorporated into future policy.

While in Northern Ireland the NSC visited Tom and Libby Clarke's farm to look at their Irish Moiled Cattle and other native breeds.



One of our aims is to provide or help publicise training material on FAnGR. Several presentations on FAnGR prepared by NSC members can be found on our website www.defra.gov.uk/fangr. Some readers may also be interested in the 'Principles of Genetic Improvement' (PGI) distance learning CD-ROM (which was partly funded by BBSRC under the Modular Training for Industry programme) and is adapted from the "Principles of Genetic Improvement (PGI)" MSc module taught by research staff from the Scottish Agricultural College and the Roslin Institute within the University of Edinburgh's MSc in Quantitative Genetics and Genome Analysis.

The PGI course aims to increase the skill level of those working in the animal breeding and animal health industries in quantitative genetic theory and genome analysis at MSc-level as applied to livestock improvement. This self-paced and self assessed programme gives people in the industry, who may not have the time available to study, the opportunity to fill knowledge gaps, get acquainted with up to date approaches and cover the subject practically and comprehensively.

Further details and information on ordering the CD ROM can be found on the website www.pgi-portal.com

Research and Development

The R+D subgroup aims to deliver the action points from the National Action Plan which focuses on Research and Development. These include, for example, the identification of research and development priorities for FAnGR, and encouraging the funding of these research projects by Government and others, identification of potential funding routes and the dissemination of R&D results.

The R+D subgroup has promoted the commissioning of a portfolio of work covering biodiversity indicators, a review of molecular characterisation studies and a suite of projects looking at various aspects of FAnGR in relation to sustainable production and environmental change.

To date, six research projects have been initiated through central, Devolved Government or other funding. Half of these studies have been completed and final reports are available on the website www.defra.gov.uk/fangr/randd.htm

Briefly:

The results from the completed studies on Biodiversity indicators have been included in the 'Biodiversity indicators in your pocket publication for 2010' <http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page4229>.

The completed review of molecular characterisation studies has reported on the level of characterisation and gaps in knowledge in relation to cattle, sheep, pigs, goats and poultry. It is

clear from the report that further work in this area would be beneficial.

The committee has developed a list of funding priorities and is continuing to work to identify potential funding routes to support these key research areas.

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