

RECENT NEWS FROM IMAGE

Co-ordinator of the IMAGE project Michèle Tixier-Boichard shares with PEN some updates from the Horizon 2020-funded initiative

Following the kick-off meeting of the H2020 IMAGE project on animal genetic resources (Paris, 19-20 May 2016), the first actions have been undertaken and the website is now open. Considering the importance of involving stakeholders from the very beginning of the project, the first IMAGE Dialogue Forum was held on 28 August 2016 at Riddel Hall, Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland, in association with the European Regional Focal Point (ERFP) General Assembly and the European Federation of Animal Science (EAAP) conference. Stakeholders with wide-ranging experience joined the IMAGE partners to discuss their views on the management of gene bank resources.

The forum gathered 51 participants from 24 European countries, who were ERFP national co-ordinators, scientists, government officials, and representatives from industries and NGOs.

The event was hosted and moderated by Waltraud Kugler of the SAVE Foundation, Switzerland. After three presentations introducing IMAGE and animal gene banks, the discussion focused on several issues:

- Sanitary regulations – they may limit the use of old material; are derogations possible?;
- Data sharing for research – which incentive, which tools to facilitate sharing?;
- Sharing gene bank material – which features are of interest for the breeding sector?;
- Ethics and biotechnology – will any technology be easily accepted by the public?;
- Standardisation of protocols and harmonisation of conservation criteria are needed; and
- Options and limits of gene banks – is it always possible to recreate a breed? How can gene banks be most useful by supporting the development of endangered breeds?

A survey among gene bank managers was launched in October 2016 to learn more about the current state of gene bank collections for livestock, both for reproductive material (germplasm) and for genomic material. In January 2017, a total of 53 gene banks had answered, which is a quite satisfactory rate of response, showing that both types of gene banks were interested in contributing. The majority of them declared they had a quality management system and agreed to share their experience and participate in further work, which perfectly answers the expectations of IMAGE. A more refined analysis will be made available through our website.



The challenges for an integrated information system were discussed at a meeting with the UN Food and Agricultural Organization in Rome, Italy, in on 16-17 November 2016, with a more dedicated meeting taking place in Milan on 13 December, 2016 to identify the technical solutions to interface different databases.

Looking ahead

IMAGE partners are now getting ready for their next annual assembly, which will take place near Göttingen, Germany, from 22-24 March. In addition to monitoring work progress, this assembly will give our PhD students an opportunity to introduce themselves to the community, and will feature invited talks from other European research projects on animal and plant genetic diversity.

Our work programme in 2017 will feature an important genome sequencing effort, for 300 chickens, 100 pigs, 100 sheep and 20 cattle, to better characterise gene bank material.

A second Dialogue Forum will take place at the next EAAP meeting from 28 August to 1 September 2017 in Estonia's capital, Tallinn.



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