



SAVE foundation



European Agrobiodiversity Day

29th September 2008

Ark and Rescue Centres

The theme of this year's European Agrobiodiversity Day are the Ark and Rescue centres – which are an important part of the European Livestock Breeds Ark and Rescue Net [ELBARN] project. Through ELBARN, we aim to create a network of Ark and Rescue Centres that will both promote Europe's traditional breeds to the public as well as be available in times of crisis.

What is the purpose of an Ark and Rescue Centre?

An Ark and Rescue Centre can be used for many purposes – it can promote the traditional breeds of the region, it can educate visitors about the breeds as well as the traditional farming methods that go with the breeds. Not only animals can be promoted, it is also possible to use Ark and Rescue Centres to display and teach traditional production methods – from cheese-making through to spinning and weaving.

Managed breeding is an additional and very important function of an Ark and Rescue Centre. Many traditional breeds have, unfortunately, only small populations of breeding animals. This is due to the fact that agriculture in Europe has changed dramatically and animals that can be farmed intensively through modern, agro-industrial methods are favoured. However, the traditional breeds hold many advantages over the modern breeds and these special factors are in need of conservation. These factors include such things as resistance to disease, hardiness and high fertility. In order to make good use of this high fertility and to build up a number of stock that can carry these valuable characteristics into the future, it is important to plan the breeding carefully so that none of the genetic diversity found in the breed is lost.

Alongside these important functions, an Ark and Rescue Centre is also intended to be a place where animals that are important for the conservation of a breed can be placed in times of danger. There are many kinds of danger that can face a breed, the death or illness of owners, the promotion of modern breeds leading to cross-breeding and traditional breeds being no longer kept or the threat of epidemics, war or rural-urban migration. This means that an Ark and Rescue Centre will always be open to accept genetically important animals to protect the breed from being lost.

Rescue of an Endangered Breed

When animals are “rescued”, it is essential that there is a place for them to go to. The exciting rescue of the Turopolje pig breed during the civil war in Croatia (199?) was a success story – but this success was only possible because there was somewhere to place the pigs at short notice. An Ark and Rescue Centre needs to be able to take care of animals at short notice and look after them until a suitable permanent home is found.

These days the Turopolje have found their permanent home in the rough pasture and flooded hard-wood valleys situated between Sisak and Stara Gradiska, which form the Nature Park Lonjsko Polje. The Nature Park Lonjsko Polje represents a cultivated landscape which was typical for large parts of Central Europe about 100-150 years ago. Today, the flooded river valley and sandy rough pastures in Lonjsko Polje are a unique “living” example of such a landscape. With the creation of the Nature Park, conservation measures for the Turopolje Pig are secured. The breed is the most endangered Croatian livestock species besides the Dubrovnik Pramenka sheep. The park administration actively supports the conservation of Turopolje Pigs and has integrated the breed into the park's conservation concept. The animals have proved to be an important factor in the management of the rough pasture.

<http://www.save-foundation.net/english/turopolje-e.htm>

Types of Ark and Rescue Centres:

Educational Ark and Rescue Centres

- Will inform the public, organise special information programs for schools and organisations of farmers, scientists, hobby breeders, consumer groups.
- And safeguard the knowledge of breeding rare breeds, including traditional and cultural aspects of animal breeding

Educational Ark and Rescue Centres

- Will have a representative sample of endangered and well preserved, typical local farm animals,
- Will provide guided tours, documentation and meeting rooms
- Will be equipped to offer “learning by doing” programs such as working with products of traditional farming (cooking, cheese making, production of ham, weaving, ...)

Farm Ark and Rescue Centres will focus on

- Breeding of endangered farm animals
- Production and sale of products of local breeds
- Sustainable farming with local breeds
- Farming in combination with nature preservation or grazing projects or caring for handicapped people (care farms, hypo, asino and other forms of zoo therapy)
- Farm holidays (bed and breakfast)

Farm Ark and Rescue Centres

- Will be professionally run farms
- They should be self-supporting and profitable,
- The majority of animals present on the farms should belong to local, breeds,
- Should recognise animal welfare standards,
- Should be open to the public and provide guided tours.
- Farm Ark and Rescue Centres should be well spread geographically in order to minimize risks in case of outbreak of contagious diseases.

An example of an establishment from your own country that can be used as an Ark and Rescue Centre:

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In many countries in Europe, there are organisations supporting and promoting the conservation of Agro-Biodiversity. The SAVE Foundation, founded in 1993, acts as a European umbrella organisation for these organisations. It promotes and coordinates activities to conserve endangered breeds of domestic animals and cultivated plant varieties. The SAVE Foundation does not work with a romantic ideal of how it once was, rather the SAVE Foundation undertakes practical work to ensure a sustainable future for the diverse genetic material stored within the traditional breeds and species of Europe. The SAVE Foundation supports, plans and realises on-farm conservation projects alongside collecting and disseminating information about the traditional and endangered European Agro-Biodiversity. This work is undertaken in conjunction with the SAVE Partner Organisations. The European Monitoring Institute for Rare Breeds and Seeds is the scientific research unit of the SAVE Foundation.

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