



Successful Conservation through an Animal-Loan-System

Securing the survival of endangered breeds through the support and management of small groups of animals is a method of conservation that has proved to be successful. The system, as practised by SAVE, works with three levels of actor:

1. The SAVE Foundation provides the starter capital to buy or contribute to the purchase of the original animals. The SAVE Foundation also provides the know-how and support required for the system to function correctly.
2. A local or national breed organisation or NGO, with the support of SAVE, adapts the system to fit the local situation. They are charged with
 - a. Finding and purchasing suitable animals
 - b. Finding suitable keepers
 - c. Planning breeding strategies and managing them
 - d. Running a herdbook for the animals
3. Interested and committed farmers undertake the practical day-to-day care of the animals and benefit from the products and services the animals can provide.

The last examples of a breed are collected together, where necessary they are purchased. They are then sorted into breeding groups in order to maximise the genetic basis available. These breeding groups are loaned to interested and committed farmers. To secure against the risk of poor animal husbandry or disease and also in order to place as many males as possible, the groups are given to as many farmers as possible.

The farmer has the use of the breeding group in his care. Any milk, wool or meat etc produced is his own to use or sell. The Project retains the ownership of the breeding group and the right to buy any off-spring in order to form new breeding groups and to promote population growth in the breed. This right to buy works under the principle of "first refusal"; only if the Project does not wish to purchase the off-spring can they be sold to third parties. Likewise, if the Project wishes to sell one of the animals it owns, the keeper of that animal has first refusal. The farmer may pay for animals he wishes to own by giving a suitable young animal to the conservation programme. These rights are legally secured by all parties signing a contract to that effect.

With the guidance of SAVE, a local or national breed organisation/NGO keeps a herdbook and manages the breeding. This organisation ensures that the breeding programme is fulfilled. They also meet with the farmer to decide which animals can be slaughtered. The slaughter of an animal must be in conjunction to another suitable animal being reared in its place.

As soon as the breeding population is stabilised, the breed can be released into the free market and the tight controls can be relaxed. However, it is sensible if the managing NGO or breed organisation continues to run a herdbook, continues to own a nucleus group and continues to plan the breeding, preferably retaining ownership of as many males as possible.

This system can be adapted to meet local conditions. The options should be discussed by SAVE and the local/national breed organisation or NGO. Different regulations will influence who owns the animals and what contract is to be signed. There are many possibilities that can be considered in order to find the optimal solution to any problems in implementing this system.

The following is a shortened explanation of how the system works:

There are two possible ways of buying the first animals:

a) The purchase of breeding animals is supported by SAVE up to 50%

OR

b) The whole amount required is given by SAVE as starter capital.

- The animals become the property of a local breed organisation.
- The animals are given to a farmer who has shown his commitment to the system.
- The farmer has the use of the animals but not the ownership.
- The breed organisation keeps the right to buy the off-spring of the original group in order to build up new groups to enlarge the breed.
- The farmer can keep the animals for himself if he gives the off-spring to the breed organisation (one for each animal kept).
- This off-spring is then given by the breed organisation to another interested farmer.
- An animal can only be slaughtered if it has a) produced off-spring and b) with the permission of the breeding advisor.

The breed organisation should:

- Always own the same amount of animals or more.
- Keep control of the breeding strategy.
- Try to remain owner of the breeding males.
- Adapt the system to fit in with local conditions, with help from SAVE.
- Make sure that the animals are kept in a way that ensures animal welfare.