

Future of the sheep and goat dairy sectors

Summary report on conclusions of International Symposium, Zaragoza (Spain), 28-30 October 2004

By A Ayerbe (FR) and E Hopkin (IDF)

This international symposium attracted 201 registered participants, from 36 countries* and seven international and regional organizations**. The symposium was organized jointly by International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agricultural Studies (CIHEAM), Instituto Agronómico Mediterráneo de Zaragoza (IAMZ), International Dairy Federation (IDF) and Comité Nacional Lechero (Spanish member of IDF), in collaboration with Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), European Association for Animal Production (EAAP), International Committee for Animal Recording (ICAR) and International Resource Centre on Utilization of Information on Milk Production in Small Ruminants (CIRVAL). The symposium was supported by Ministro de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación de España. Papers by 28 leading speakers from 14 countries and international bodies were presented, supplemented by 96 posters from 26 countries.

Sheep milk and goat milk make up a world of contrasts. In some countries “small ruminants” are a vital part of the rural economy. (“The goat is the poor man’s cow.”) In others, goats milk cheeses and sheep milk cheeses are in the luxury range.

In general, the future prospects are good, although dependent on developments in agricultural policy (such as subsidies), in society (passing farms from generation to generation) and in the willingness to get organized.

Statistical data on sheep and goats milk, products

In much of the world – developed and developing – information on the production and use of sheep and goats milk is not available or, if available, difficult to verify.

Marketing sheep and goats milk products

Traditional products and new products must develop in parallel, the former making needing to be better known for their specific qualities and the latter in new ways of consumption (in cooking, for example).

Experience in the marketing of cows milk products, especially in market studies and consumer demands, can cross-fertilize that of sheep and goats milk since all are part of the same family. We must not forget that in many areas, despite market opportunities for sheep and/or goat milk products, the level of organization is not sufficient to develop the trade in these products and they stay on the farm or in the village.

-
- * Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Portugal, Rumania, Spain, Sudan, Switzerland, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Kingdom, USA.
 - ** CIHEAM, CIRVAL, EAAP, EDA, EU, ICARDA, IDF

Production and quality of sheep and goats milk

Genetic factors and good husbandry determine the composition and quality of the milk. Quality criteria must be established, however, and broadcast. Somatic cell counts, as indicators of hygienic quality, need further attention especially as they are important for further processing, for example, in relation to cheese yield and organoleptic quality. Many other issues now held in suspense deserve attention, including animal welfare and its effects on milk quality.

New technology

In two areas the application of new technology offers interesting prospects:

- increasingly refined determination of the composition of milk and the impact of technology on the characteristics of the products and on the recognition and protection of traditional products,
- new products derived from new technology, providing different “functionalities”, such as long-life milk produced by microfiltration.

Nutritional properties and health

The differences in composition between cows, sheep and goats milk imply differences in nutritional value of the products, although the influence of animal feeding and environmental factors must be taken into account.

At the same time, however, the similarities are more important than the differences and this means that certain facts must be recognized unequivocally. This is especially true in relation to allergic reactions where making a distinction can be difficult to justify scientifically. The implication is that in promotion, and in defence, milk from all species must be treated together.

Summary

- The combination of very different topics in a single symposium creates a valuable synergy.
- Many topics deserve more attention, more discussion, more co-operation than they are getting today.
- Legislation and standards can protect traditional products but can also inhibit innovation.
- Codex and WTO potentially have a major impact, as well as quality marks, brands and designations of origin.
- Analytical results and scientific findings can help define indicators of origin and production conditions.
- Sustainable rural development and animal welfare need to be considered in relation to their effect on quality.
- Application and refinement of technology can ensure food safety and continuity of production.
- Greater knowledge of the relationship between nutrition, health and functionality is needed, and will benefit milk of all species.