

Sustainable use of local sheep breeds in Eastern Alps

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This study is part of the SHEEP UP project (Rural Development Project, Veneto Region), which aim to generate added value through the Sustainable use of local sheep breeds in Veneto Region (Eastern Alps). The four local breeds are: Alpagota, Brogna, Foza and Lamon.

Lamon and Foza breeds are at high risk of extinction, presenting respectively less than 400 and 150 heads. Instead Alpagota counts 3000 heads and Brogna counts 2800 heads.

Building on previous studies, a smartphone application has been developed with the aim to improve cooperation between farmers and to support mating plans to reduce the risk of inbreeding.

The sample consist of 45 farms which were surveyed: 14 for Alpagota, 13 for Brogna, 4 for Foza and 14 for Lamon. For each farm we analysed the following data: herds' size; land use; presence of other animal species; farm's activities and relative income; opinions on future perspectives. In addition, the analysis involved the use of focus groups on peculiarities and threats of managing flocks on mountain areas.

Results showed that the average number of heads is 95 for Alpagota, 109 for Brogna, 73 for Lamon and 13.5 for Foza breed. The farms rearing a flock of less than 20 heads is 35.7% of farms for Alpagota and 42.9% for Lamon, but 7.7% of Brogna, presenting instead 23.1% of flocks with more than 100 heads, as it is also for 28.6% of Alpagota farms, but for Lamon only 7.1%. Most farms own pastures and meadows, indicating a particular ease for organic productions. Average farms' surface is 24.4 ha, which is mostly represented by pastures and meadows (more than 65%). The most numerous flocks are monospecific and belong to Alpagota and Brogna certified breed, also presenting a more organized supply chain than in Lamon and Foza breeds' realities. Nevertheless, almost all participants breed multiple species of animal, thus indicating the need to diversify income flows and improve the supply chain. For the purpose the promotion of meat and milk products, yolky wool and the evaluation of multifunctionality is already taking place.

The final objective of the project is the development of product quality schemes based on the direct experience of marginalised livestock keepers. The involvement of farmers (in particular smallholders) in multiactors approaches is fundamental for the conservation of Alpine sheep breeds, and efficacious marketing strategies linked to product quality label can support the sustainable development of these farming systems.