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## **UN agency urges countries to do more to safeguard animal genetic diversity**



Some 70 per cent of the world's rural poor rely on livestock as an important component of their livelihoods

24 November 2010 – Despite efforts by an increasing number of countries to safeguard the resilience of the world's food production system, much more needs to be done to catalogue, conserve and better manage the genetic diversity of livestock, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) said today.

[According](#) to the agency, countries have begun to take action, some three years after 191 countries adopted the Global Plan of Action for Animal Genetic Resources after the realization that one livestock breed had been lost per month during the 2000-2007 period and that 20 per cent of all livestock breeds were at risk of extinction.

Ten countries have reported that they have established and are implementing national strategies for managing animal genetic resources, and 28 others have either finalized strategies and are moving towards implementation or are in the midst of developing their plans.

An informal survey conducted by FAO also shows that a range of activities are being undertaken on the ground. For example, Belgium is carrying out a major survey of sheep, cattle and pig breeds, an effort that will result in genetic samples selected for storage in cryobanks, while Bolivia is involved in a similar effort for camelids, guinea pigs, cattle, sheep, goats and pigs.

Kenya is including information on livestock holdings as part of its human population census and is preparing a national breed survey to gather additional information, while Ghana is recruiting and training specialists in the characterization and conservation of indigenous breeds.

China has granted 138 indigenous breeds protected status and has established 119 conservation farms and gene banks at the state level.

“Still, FAO cautions that progress has not been consistent across all world regions and that much more needs to be done,” the agency said in a press release.

According to FAO’s latest report on the status and trends of animal genetic resources, 21 per cent of livestock breeds continue to be at risk of extinction. Some 1,710 breeds of livestock, ranging from chickens to ostrich and from donkeys to cattle, are in danger of extinction, compared to 1,649 in 2008 and 1,491 in 2006.

The report also warns that information on population size and composition of an estimated 35 per cent of known mammalian and avian breeds are not known, a gap which poses a serious constraint to effective prioritization and planning of breed conservation measures.

“Like a well-balanced stock portfolio, genetic diversity makes food production more resilient in the face of threats like famine, drought, disease and the emerging challenge posed by climate change,” said Irene Hoffmann, head of FAO's Animal Genetic Resources Programme.

Existing animal gene pool contains valuable, irreplaceable resources that will be vital for food security and agricultural development in the coming decades, she said.

FAO has developed a funding strategy aimed at channelling support towards improved animal genetic resource management and strengthening international cooperation for assisting developing countries implement the Global Plan of Action.

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