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Contribution of Creole breeds to quality assurance schemes: valuation of local resources in the meat sector in French West Indies

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Our paper focus on some bio-technical arguments, issued from scientific results, which can be pointed out to implement quality assurance schemes for local animal breeds in the French Antilles.

In these regions, animal breeding has been based for a long time on local populations, from crossbred origins. These populations acquired original characteristics, linked to their origins, their history and their usage, and the breeding management and the environmental conditions they faced. Thus they exhibit a remarkable adaptation to tropical conditions and a high productivity in this environment, in particular in relation to their maternal abilities.

But the organized animal production sector has progressively turned away from these local breeds, as their growth performances, their body development and their conformation were considered too low by the butchers, at least in intensive management systems. However, they remain important particularly in small scale mixed farming systems, and also in relation with a strong cultural heritage and image.

Professional initiatives has recently emerged in order to conserve the local populations, or even to implement genetic improvement programs, in order to improve their production level and to promote their use. In particular, they lead to the creation of approved breeder associations, in charge of the management of the breeds, the definition of their attributes and the certification of purebred animals, and their promotion. The main objective of these breeding programs is to raise the productivity, through the selection of improved sires for production traits, and a reappraisal of adaptation traits.

More recently, the breeders considered the implementation of quality assurance schemes as an opportunity to value the local breed in the local meat market. Different tools are offered to these breeds that could be implemented, mainly based on territorial approach (National Park or Ultra Peripheral EU regions). These attempts need references to define the specific attributes of the product and also the management conditions that influence them, which may contribute to their recognition and certification.

In the first steps of this track, in which INRA and its partners are involved, a bio-technical approach of the main sources of variation of the quality of animal products is performed. Our purpose is to characterize the products obtained from these breeds, to define the criteria that may be used in order to promote these products in a certified commercial niche, and to study the production conditions that may lead to a better valuation of the products on these criteria. Several examples will be cited, such as the definition of management systems based on the use of local feedstuffs for pork meat production based on Creole pig, the definition of dietary references on goat meat obtained from Creole goat in various production systems, or in the other ruminants species, such as Martinik hair sheep, or Brahman and Creole meat cattle breeds in Martinique and Guadeloupe.