We cannot afford to let breeds die out, and we must act to protect the genetic variation that exists in our mainstream breeds and which risks being eroded under selection processes which prioritize limited commercial goals.

Some breeds may, it is true, never serve an agricultural function again but we cannot be certain which those ones are — and in any case, they are all significant elements of our culture and regional identities.

With its representation from all branches of the UK livestock community, the NSC is working to ensure that the genetic resources that we have inherited will continue to thrive, for our benefit and for that of future generations.

For further information visit our website, where you will find links to other organizations which share our aims.

NSC FAnGR Secretariat

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Working for our countryside, our living heritage and the farming of the future
Securing the future, celebrating the past

- The UK was the cradle of modern animal breeding. Our breeds, with their proud national and local histories and cultural connections, have also been hugely influential worldwide and the process continues with UK-based multinational companies being fundamentally important to the world’s livestock industries.
- Demand for meat, eggs, milk and other animal products will continue to increase worldwide as countries become more affluent and these demands must be reconciled with the necessity for action to mitigate global climate change.
- While our farming contributes enormously to national food security, changing market requirements mean the roles of our livestock breeds are changing, and that the rate of change will accelerate.
- All this means that our current dependence on a small number of commercially highly significant breeds is placing our future food security at risk. An essential defensive strategy is to conserve our farm animal genetic resources in order to “future-proof” our farming.
- The Committee exists to promote and advance this strategy, both in order to preserve a vital part of our cultural heritage and to ensure that future generations have the genetic materials to adapt their farming to challenges of kinds which we, today, will find hard to imagine.

Working together

Government policy is changing in ways which will help conservation of livestock biodiversity.
- Farmers taking part in agri-environmental schemes and keeping certain native breeds could be eligible for specific enhanced payments for conserving genetic resources.
- A policy is emerging which would give herds and flocks seen as being of conservation importance, a degree of protection from disease culls, subject to satisfactory biosecurity arrangements.
- Native breeds of hardy grazing livestock are proving ideal for the conservation grazing programmes essential for the protection of many rare and threatened habitats.
- New genetic techniques, developed for commercial reasons, are being applied to the conservation of minor and rare breeds.

National Standing Committee for Farm Animal Genetic Resources

Formed in 2008 under the chairmanship of Professor Geoff Simm of the Scottish Agricultural College, this committee advises the UK government and devolved administrations on matters relating to the conservation and sustainable utilization of Britain’s farm animal genetic resources. The diverse membership includes individuals from the farming industries, academic communities, and breed and conservation organizations.

Also in the committee’s brief is the accomplishment of 38 Recommended Actions aimed at securing the future of our living heritage of livestock breeds. These relate to four overall goals:

1. Identifying and monitoring UK native breeds and their genetic structures;
2. Defining priorities for conservation, including development of legally robust criteria for herds and flocks meritng special protection in the event of disease outbreaks;
3. Applying native breeds in policy initiatives on sustainability and rural development;
4. Ensuring that initiatives on animal health take account of the special problems facing numerically rare or geographically concentrated native breeds.

All these goals fit in with the UK’s commitments under the Convention on Biodiversity, which acknowledges farm animal genetic resources as important components of global biodiversity.