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Does Diversification of Smallholder’s Animal Production Systems Contribute to Sustainable Development in Northern Patagonia, Argentina?

SEBASTIAN VILLAGRA¹, CLEMENS WOLLNY¹, MANFRED ZELLER²

¹*Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Animal Breeding and Husbandry in the Tropics and Subtropics, Germany*

²*Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Institute of Rural Development, Germany*

Abstract

In Río Negro Province, Northern Patagonia, more than 4,000 producers practice extensive small livestock farming. Approximately 80 % are smallholders, mainly fiber production oriented. The production system faces an environmental and socio-economic crisis due to high production costs, grassland degradation and widespread poverty. Ecological sustainability, economic feasibility and socio-political acceptability are the three dimensions of sustainable development. The main objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of diversification on the socio-economic and range condition of the farms, under the following hypothesis: “An increasing degree of product diversification increases the incomes without increase grassland degradation in smallholder livestock systems of Southern Río Negro”.

Field studies will be conducted between December 2002 and April 2004. An exploratory survey is currently implemented to investigate effects of natural and socio-economic factors on the development of livestock systems. Standardized interviews will be applied on a representative sample of 100 farms involving diversified and non-diversified farms. Through an economic analysis at farm level, the impact of the different degrees of diversification on farm household income will be evaluated. The impact of diversification on range condition will be analyzed.

The following results are expected:

- Contribution of each activity to the whole farm will explain the farmer rationale
- Detection of resource losses will lead to recommendations for system improvement
- Economic and ecological analysis will provide information on the potential productivity in the region in diversified production systems
- Formulation of adequate policies.

Keywords: Diversification, Patagonia, smallholder production systems, wool production