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Combating Extinction through the Economic Assessment and Capture of the Cultural Values of the Italian Valdostana Castana Cattle Breed

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Abstract

The number of local livestock breeds and the important animal genetic resources (AnGR) that they represent is declining, both at a global level and within European countries. In Europe, the process of extinction is mainly associated with their lower financial profitability relative to other breeds and alternative economic activities.

Economic valuation of AnGR provides an important tool with which to justify conservation priorities. The development of appropriate valuation methodologies has advanced significantly over recent years. Nevertheless, cultural values are often neglected in the calculation of the total economic value (TEV) of livestock breeds, leading to their sub-optimal conservation and use. One reason for this is that assessing cultural aspects and other non-market values of livestock is challenging due to their common resource character. AnGR and in particular their cultural value may be considered as a quasi-public good, responsible for various positive global externalities and generating benefits of a non-excludable nature.

This paper explores a component of the non-market value of the Italian Valdostana Castana cattle breed through the use of a survey-based contingent valuation method (CVM). Particular focus is placed on the cultural value of the Valdostana Castana as this breed still plays a central part in the socio-cultural and agricultural activities of the rural population in the Aosta valley. For the purposes of this study, cultural values are understood to be those associated with cultural events involving the Valdostana Castana (such as the “Battle of the Queens”). The CVM involves assessing local residents’ and tourists’ willingness to pay for the specific services that are directly or indirectly obtained from the maintenance of this breed by local farmers. Based on the results of this study, policy measures that could facilitate the capture of such values and their being channelled towards the conservation and sustainable use of the Valdostana Castana cattle breed are presented.

Keywords: Animal genetic resources, contingent valuation, cultural values, Italy, Valdostana Castana cattle breed