

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me to welcome all of you warmly in the Czech Republic and especially in this exceptional town Kutna Hora, by the occasion of kick-off the pan-European ELBARN project. The project which is aimed at creating a rescue network to our endangered heritage breeds.

I am not sure who of organizers selected the site, maybe just it chanced to be but to me there is something symbolic between history of this unique town and history of our breeds. Let me to mention few facts.

Once (about 1290 – 1300) Kutna Hora used to be the second-dominant after the Prague capital, the treasury of Czech kings, based on rich mines, providing one third of European silver production that time. A footprint of that power you can still meet all round here - both patrician and sacral architectural jewels built since gothic to baroque.

After 300 years of glory, a first attack of „globalization“ in huge imports of American silver led to stepwise downfall of the town. And later, even worse times were to come, especially after the World War II.

Only after beginning 90´ of the last century, considerably neglected state was recognized and since 1992 the town underwent the largest ever city renewal from all the CR. That was financed by the Cultural heritage rescue program. In 1995 the city has been enlisted into UNESCO heritage sites.

Similar history we can find in our breeds. Raised and cultivated for ages, they brought revenue and success. During the last century and especially after the World War II they were stepwise absorbed and nearly eradicated by modern global breeds, through hardly understandable crossbreeding experiments.

After intervention of few scientists and research institutions, in 1992 old national heritage breeds of livestock were recognized as endangered gene reserves in the new legislation and in 1995 a program on their conservation and utilization financed by the State was launched.

Over the last decade, we succeeded to attract over 1000 individual keepers and about 20 breeders associations to enrol into the program. It is based on in-situ controlled breeding of selected individuals, carriers of original genes. Mating programs are designed to maintain and distribute majority of these genes within that virtual nucleus. By far, this is not an ideal state, it brings also problems, and I look forward to profit on our future cooperation when trying to solve some of them.

I can see here lot of well known faces. We are meeting each other, different time, different places, but the same idea: to conserve our animal genetic resources.

And I can see also a lot of new ones and this is really great that we may share our experience, our problems, and our ideas, to strengthen each other in our effort.

So, let the atmosphere during the coming two and half days be friendly and operational, straightforward, in an optimistic humour, to produce expected outcomes and make the first step.

Welcome on board and let's start.

Vera Matlova

National Coordinator, Czech Republic