

Swiss Roundtable on 17.11.2022 (Summary)

The Roundtable took place on a dairy sheep farm with an associated cheese dairy in Entlebuch. The event started with a social exchange between the participants over coffee and Zopf (special bread) and 20 Persons attended it.

Steffen Werne introduced the SMARTER project and made the general introduction. This was later followed by technical information from the various work packages by Beat Bapst (Qualitas AG, subcontractor). A discussion arose within the audience about the benefits of breeding values, with the majority of participants (farmers and Federal Office for Agriculture) pointing out the advantages of breeding value estimation. Beat Bapst also explained why breeding value estimation is important and what progress has already been made.

The results from WP2 and from other WPs were received with great interest. There is an interest in finding out the final results of the other WPs as well, since some preliminary results could be shown in the slides provided due to the still ongoing project.

The breeding organisations find the results very interesting, but at the moment the tools for implementation are missing. The breeding organisations are partly in a field of tension between members who are more interested in hobby husbandry and show breeding (conformation traits), and on the other hand there are also professional farms among the members that work very production-oriented.

However, breeding for parasite resistance is generally met with interest. The Sheep Breeders Association runs a breeding station. It would be conceivable to carry out artificial parasite infections on future breeding rams in order to produce phenotypes for these breeding animals. Details were discussed, such as how long such animals would have to be cared for at the breeding station and what age would be most suitable. Furthermore, the question was raised whether half sibling testing is possible to develop breeding values. As a possible alternative to station testing, sampling of the animals on practical farms was discussed, analogous to the procedure in WP2 in the Swiss Lacaune population. In this way, breeding progress could be achieved even without station testing.

The report on the harmonisation of breeding values was also received with interest. The fact that the Swiss populations of Saanen and Alpine goats were genetically relatively far away from the populations in Italy or France was attributed to the lack of exports and imports in the past years. There is a fundamental interest in exchanging breeding animals, but this fails due to the strict import conditions of the EU.

The SMARTER discussion was held in an event room of a Lacaune dairy sheep farm, which itself participated in the SMARTER project and provided phenotypes. Lukas Hofstetter, the farm manager, gave the participants a tour of the farm at the end of the event. Together with his brother's farm, they cultivate about 60 ha of land. Lukas keeps about 260 Lacaune dairy sheep on his farm, as well as about 100 other young and rearing animals and 3 rams. The farm is certified organic and Lukas always tries to avoid using synthetic chemical dewormers whenever possible. If animals fall ill and still need treatment, they are consistently selected out at the end of lactation. The most important decision-making criteria for selection are therefore phenotypic disease resistance, but also the results of the linear description (conformation traits) and, of course, milk yield. About 450 kg of milk per animal are milked from almost concentrate-free feeding. Possibly, the conversion to concentrate-free production will take place in the near future. The milk is delivered to the affiliated cheese dairy (EMSCHA = Entlebucher Milchschaft GmbH, <https://www.emscha.ch/>) and processed into cheese and dairy products.