



UKGLE NEWSLETTER

January 2024

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the latest edition of the UK Genetics for Livestock and Equines (UKGLE) newsletter. The Genetic Science and Conservation Team work closely with the Committee who advise the four Governments of the UK on the conservation and sustainable use of livestock genetic resources and through our newsletter, we get the chance to update you on some of the Team and Committee’s latest work.

We hope you find the newsletter interesting and that it gives you an idea of the work we have been doing since our previous publication, as well as an insight into our future work and ethos.

Do let us know what you think via our new email – we would love to hear your views.
ukglectariat@defra.gov.uk

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UKGLE Committee Meetings

The last UKGLE Committee meeting was held virtually in October 2023, key items of discussion centred around the proposed amendments to the Zootechnical Legislation (see update below), and feedback and actions from the initial Ministerial Native Breeds Roundtable. The Committee will be meeting again in early Spring.

The next Committee meeting will be held in London on 15th March 2024.

Ministerial Native Breeds Roundtable

The 2nd successful Native Breeds Roundtable was held on the 6th December and was once again hosted by the Minister of State for Food, Farming and Fisheries, the Rt Hon Mark Spencer MP. The event was attended by 25 stakeholders. Items discussed included Zootech legislation and the pending public consultation on proposed amendments using the Retained EU Law Act 2023, Geographical Indicators and Trademarking.

There were also presentations on the [Sustainable Farming Incentive](#) and [Farming Innovation Programme](#) with advice on available funding and how to apply. A communication detailing current farming support packages is attached with this newsletter.

Finally, the Smaller Abattoir Fund (SAF) was announced just ahead of its launch on 13th December. For further information please see the press notice [here](#) and a blog post about the fund [here](#).

Defra will be hosting an update meeting for the Roundtable stakeholders on 11th March 2024.

International Meetings

In January 2023, we attended the Intergovernmental Technical Working Group on Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, held in Rome Italy. Agenda items included the role of microorganisms relevant to ruminant digestion, the role of animal genetic resources in mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, access and benefit sharing of animal genetic resources, and digital sequence information on animal genetic resources for food and agriculture. Finally, there was an update on the preparation of *The Third Report on the State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* for which countries must submit their reports by June 2024. The full report of the meeting can be found [here](#).

In May 2023, we attended the Working Groups meeting of the [ERFP \(animalgeneticresources.net\)](#), held in Toledo Spain. Agenda items included discussions on effective population sizes, how genetic diversity contributes to resilience and robustness as well as a presentation of the EU Reference Centre for Endangered Animal Breeds and an update from the Northern Europe and Baltic Native Horse Network. Finally, the FAO is continuing to improve DADIS (the [Domestic Animal Diversity Information System \(DAD-IS\)](#) | [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(fao.org\)](#))

) that our national inventory data feeds into annually, to develop and refine low cost and cost-efficient methodologies for estimating size of national breed populations and better visualisation of inventory data.

National Breed Inventory 2023



The annual inventory survey for monitoring breed populations and breeding structures for cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, horses, and poultry that serve as a genetic resource in the UK will be sent to societies in early 2024 (for 2023 data), with results expected to be published in the summer.

Breed societies/organisations are strongly encouraged to engage with national inventory updates and submit the requested statistical data. We very much appreciate everyone's contributions. The inventory helps to show how breed populations are changing over time and identifies status, trends, and potential threats. The results for the 2023 inventory (2022 data) can be found on this page:

[UK Farm Animal Genetic Resources \(FAnGR\) breed inventory results 2022 statistics release - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-farm-animal-genetic-resources-fan-gr-breed-inventory-results-2022-statistics-release)

If you require any advice or support with your inventory data, then please contact us at ukglesecretariat@defra.gov.uk.

Zootech Legislation Reform

We are proposing to make a number of amendments to the UK's Zootech legislative regime. The purpose being to improve the effectiveness of the legislation by improving clarity, reducing ambiguity, and reducing the risk of unintentional non-compliance by UK breed societies and breeding operations.

We have worked with UKGLE and stakeholders to agree on several proposed amendments to improve the legislation, that include:

- providing the Competent Authority (CA) with the ability to refuse approval of a breeding programme (BP) on the grounds that an approved BP already exists for that breed within the UK,
- adding a formal appeals process for applicants to appeal against decisions made by the CA such as the rejection of an application,
- adding more robust links to health-related legislation,
- adding a requirement for breeding organisations to visually verify the import health certificates, and
- adding additional definitions to support interpretation of the legislation.

In January 2024, we gained Ministerial approval to launch an 8-week public consultation on our intended amendments, to gather industry views and help inform our policy direction. We will circulate the link once the consultation is open and would be grateful for your input.

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OTHER NEWS

Contingency Planning for Disease Outbreak

Marcus Bates, a member of the UKGLE Committee, attended the Avian Influenza Outbreak and Biosecurity Comms Stakeholder Meeting to talk about the criteria for inclusion on the [Breeds At Risk \(BAR\) list](#) and the control measures societies should put in place.

Breeds on the BAR list are strongly encouraged to prepare a contingency plan, through consultation and collaboration with their vet, ready to be put into action as soon a notifiable disease is declared. The Committee produced guidelines to assist breeders and breed societies with preparing a contingency plan for breeds at risk which can be found at this link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/farm-animal-genetic-resources-fangr-guidelines-on-developing-a-contingency-plan-for-breeds-at-risk>

Latest on African Swine Fever (ASF)

A detailed report by FAO was published in 2023 and contains notes on prevention, detection and control. It can be found [here](#). The report highlights that pigs, people and pork are the main pathways for transmission via:

- Introduction of infected pigs to farms or allowing contact with infected pigs.
- People (for example, farmers, animal health workers, and traders) who have been contaminated with ASFV and who bring contaminated items onto farms, such as tools, equipment, boots and clothing, unwashed hands and vehicles.
- Feeding of food scraps or leftovers that contain uncooked pork derived from infected animals. This might be via kitchen waste, commercial feed waste or a farm worker inadvertently allowing pigs access to food waste brought onto the farm.

The virus can use other pathways to enter premises, which must never be ignored, but they are usually not as important as the three pathways listed above. Focusing on these three pathways will produce the largest gains.

Recently, USDA-ARS researchers have reclassified the number of ASF strains from 25 to just 6 unique genotypes. This may make it easier for the development of vaccines that match the different strains circulating across the globe. The report can be found [here](#).

Wider Meetings/Seminars

UKGLE Committee Members have also attended a number of wider meetings and seminars including;

- Sustaining human and planetary health through a balanced omnivorous diet. These covered topics including healthy and sustainable diets, the role of animal derived foods and balancing food production against environmental conservation.
- Within breed genetic variation and how molecular tools can help provide estimates of population size.

- Breeding livestock for sustainable systems – meeting the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by improving food security and nutrition to develop healthier animals, ensure sustainable consumption and combat climate change by creating animals with increased feed efficiency, resulting in reduced emissions and halting biodiversity loss through responsible management and conservation of genetic resources.
- Genetic lessons from the dairy industry – how implementing genomics has allowed for greater breeding yields over a nine-year period, also detailing concerns over increased inbreeding.

Thank you for taking the time to read our newsletter!

We produce newsletters with updates on key areas of the UKGLE Committee’s work. We hope you enjoyed reading about the valuable work we do to help preserve our precious genetic resources.

If you would like to be added to or removed from our circulation list, or have any comments or suggestions, please contact us at: ukglectsecretariat@defra.gov.uk OR alternatively you can find out more about the Committee and what it does [here](#).

Published by the Genetic Science and Conservation Team

*Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF*