



Rabbits



*traditional
livestock animals
in mini format*

Figure 1: A Marderkaninchen (engl. sable rabbit) classified by the G-E-H as an extremely endangered breed of rabbit. © G-E-H

Now they are everywhere again: the hares. We take this as an opportunity to turn our attention to the rabbits, which, like the hare, belong to the family of the Leporidae. Germany is a stronghold of rabbit breeding: there are almost 5,000 associations with about 160,000 breeders of pedigree rabbits.* The German-based Society for the Preservation of Old and Endangered Breeds of Domestic Animals (Gesellschaft zur Erhaltung alter und gefährdeter Haustierrassen e.V., G-E-H), a partner of the SAVE Foundation, is committed to the conservation of old rabbit breeds and presents the history of pedigree rabbit breeding in Germany below.

Breeding history of rabbits in Germany

Domestication and geographical distribution

Domestic rabbits descend from the European rabbit. Zoologically, the rabbit belongs to the family of hares (Leporidae). This family is divided into the genera *Lepus* (brown hare) and *Oryctolagus* (rabbit). Although the European rabbit is closely related to the brown hare, there are profound differences between the two (Tab. 1).

Table 1: Differences between European rabbit and hare

	European rabbit	Hare
gestational period	30 bis 32 Days	40 bis 42
cub at birth	naked and blind	haired and seeing
social condition	sociable	unsociable
number of chromosomes	44	48

The European rabbit has spread across southern and central Europe thanks to its rapid reproduction. It weighs between 2 and 3 kg which corresponds to the size of the small rabbit breeds. The home of the wild rabbit is the Iberian Peninsula. The European rabbit was known to all people who entered the Iberian Peninsula on their trade journeys or war campaigns. The "grey wilding" was often brought home and rabbits were kept in enclosures as early as the first century BC.

In the Middle Ages, rabbits were mainly kept in monasteries and royal houses and raised for consumption. Especially in the French monasteries, the animals were kept in walled courtyards or in sheds. In this way they were tamed and domestication began.

The animals became more trusting when they were housed in stables. From generation to generation they lost their wildness. Regular feeding made the rabbits bigger and heavier at the same time. This is how the starting animals for pedigree rabbit breeding came about.

Pedigree rabbit breeding

In the early days of breeding rabbits, the evaluation of animals at shows or in the breeder's barn was based on the opinion (which was also widespread in large animal breeding) that the outward appearance of a breed also reflected its special performance characteristics that distinguished it from other breeds. This view was also justified in the case of rabbits insofar as the coat represented a performance characteristic, in former times more

than now. Its quality can essentially only be estimated subjectively by a subjective assessment.

With increasing prosperity, the economic motivation of breeding rabbits has lost importance. Priority is now given to conformity with the external appearance specified in the breed standard.

The historical origin of organised pedigree rabbit breeding dates back to the second half of the 19th century.

In the case of rabbits, the establishment of breeders' associations was promoted by the rabbit's special suitability. Fodder that cannot be used by other livestock animals can be used to feed rabbits. The rabbit, in turn, can be an enrichment to the human diet. Thanks to these positive qualities, the rabbit was particularly well suited to be kept in the backyards and allotment gardens of the emerging metropolitan areas at the end of the 19th century and to contribute to the population's diet.

1874 First rabbit exhibition in Bremen

1874 "Papers on Rabbit Breeding" appear in Hildesheim

1880 Founding of the first rabbit breeding club in Chemnitz

1892 Foundation of the "Association of German Rabbit Breeders" based in Leipzig

1893 First regulations for the assessment of rabbit breeds - published by the "Association of German Rabbit Breeders"

1895 Founding of the "Association of West German Rabbit Breeders"

1906 Founding of the Special Club for Giant Piebald Breeders based in Chemnitz

1924 Foundation of the Reichsbund Association of Rabbit Breeders

Between 1933 and 1945, the associations of rabbit breeding clubs were disbanded. They were replaced by the Reichsfachgruppe Kaninchenzüchter (engl. Reich Specialist Group for Rabbit Breeders). During this time, there was a concentration on the so-called economic breeds: German lop rabbit, Blue and White Viennese, Large Chinchilla, Light Large Argenté, Small Chinchilla and White Angora.

Figure 2 (next page): Endangered rabbit breeds of Germany and their respective region of origin

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Endangered Rabbit Breeds of Germany

March 2023



Due to the political division of Germany, two central organisations were established after the Second World War.

- East Germany: Central Association of Small Animal Breeders (Zentral-verband der Kleintierzüchter) on 15th January 1946
- West Germany the Central Association of German Rabbit Breeders (ZDRK) in Northeim in March 1948

In 1953, despite the political separation, a binding uniform standard was created. Due to the fundamentally different economic situation, the objectives of pedigree rabbit breeding in the two countries, the FRG and the former GDR, were very different.

In East Germany, the focus was still on the promotion of performance characteristics. In West Germany, on the other hand, the economic motivation of pedigree rabbit breeding became less and less important. From a breeding point of view, it now lies in the conservation and promotion of breed diversity as a cultural asset and as a genetic reserve.

Taking into account the changed objectives of pedigree rabbit breeding, the commercially oriented breeders and keepers have joined forces in the "Federal Association of Rabbit Meat and Wool Producers" ("Bundesverband der Kaninchenfleisch- und wollerzeuger").

- Large Breeds
- Medium-sized Breeds
- Small breeds
- Dwarf breeds
- Hair texture breeds
- Shorthair breeds
- Long-haired breeds

Rabbit breeds on the red list

At first, the endangered rabbit breeds were on the red list of the GEH (Gesellschaft zur Erhaltung alter und gefährdeter Haustierrassen e.V.). In 1997, the Meissen lop rabbit was the first breed to be included in the category "extremely endangered". In 2002 the Angora rabbits followed, which were classified in the same endangerment category.

In 2010, for the first time, a rabbit was GEH Breed of the Year, the Meissen lop rabbit.

Since 2011, there is a joint red list of GEH, ZDRK (Zentralverband Deutscher Rassekaninchenzüchter e.V.; engl. Central association of German pedigree rabbit breeders) and the Working Group Small Animals of the Advisory Board for Animal

Genetic Resources. Currently, 9 of the 30 old rabbit breeds are on the red list (Tab. 2).

Table 2: Red list of old rabbit breeds)
(Source: G-E-H)

extremely endangered	strongly endangered	endangered
English lop rabbit	Angora rabbit	Light Groot Silver (Argenté Clair)
Fox rabbit	Harlequin rabbit	Rhineland rabbit
Marderkaninchen (engl. sable rabbit)	Lux rabbit	
	Meissner lop rabbit	

Animal Welfare

Health and animal welfare are now essential components of pedigree rabbit breeding and were an important aspect in the revision of the new edition of the ZDRK breed standard published in 2018. The guidelines for breeding and keeping pedigree rabbits were already adapted to this end in 2013 and, in addition to pen and crate dimensions, also define the correct care, feeding, husbandry and transport of pedigree rabbits, which are still considered as livestock animals.

In recent years, animal welfare has become increasingly important. Especially through publications of various animal welfare organizations, the topic of animal welfare in rabbit breeding has gained increasing public attention. Since mostly sweeping statements were made, e.g. all lop rabbits breeds show characteristics detrimental to the health and welfare of the animals and hence these breeds should be banned, the damage to the image of the breeders is great.

Frank Volkmann, Rabbit Coordinator of the G-E-H

Sources:

Das große Buch vom Kaninchen, Hrsg. Wolfgang Schlolaut; unter Mitarb. von K. Lange et al., Frankfurt am Main: DLG-Verlag; 2., überarb. und erw. Aufl.; 1998; ISBN: 3769005546

Rassekaninchenzucht. Ein Handbuch für den Kaninchenhalter und -züchter. Hrsg. Friedrich Karl Dorn, Günther März; 7. Auflage, Neumann-Neudamm, Melsungen 1989, ISBN 3-7888-0569-2

A. Feldmann (2023) Personal communication.

ZDRK Standard of 2018

* <http://www.zdrk.de/index.php?id=25>, abgerufen am 22.03.2023

Eat and be eaten

A conservation project of the Zoo Landau, Germany

Founded in 1904 and steeped in history, Landau Zoo in the Palatinate, Germany, holds 120 mostly exotic animal species on 4.5 hectares. The zoo is not only a place of recreation; it is also strongly committed to species conservation, environmental education and research. Since 2000, the zoo is managed by veterinarian Dr Jens-Ove Heckel.

In addition to small and large herbivores, birds and aquarium animals, Landau Zoo also keeps six wild animal species with a certain desire for meat such as cheetahs and forest dogs. And since "carnivores don't feed on carrots but on carrot-eaters", the supply of these carnivorous wildlife animals with meat must be ensured. The meat is to fulfil various require-



Abbildung: Light Groot Silver Rabbits, colour variation "Havana" (top left), Easter at Landau Zoo in the Palatinate (bottom left), cheetah with food in its natural form (right).

The new petting zoo built in 2016 has made it possible to devote more attention and space to the conservation and breeding of old, endangered breeds of livestock animals. Part of the petting zoo is reserved for rabbits, which are kept in an enclosure designed in accordance with animal welfare. Breeding with the rabbits has also recently been started. In consultation with the chairman of the Central Association of German Pedigree Breeders of Rabbits (ZDRK), Mr Bernd Graf, the zoo decided to breed the Light Groot Silver Rabbit in the "slightly rusty" colour variation "Havana" (brown). According to the G-E-H Red List, this rabbit breed is considered endangered (category III). In 2021, there were nine breeders in Germany with a total of only 33 females and 19 males of this colour variation.

ments: It should be of high quality, the animals which are to be sacrificed should be kept in accordance with welfare and the acceptance of the meat by the carnivores should be high. In the past, frozen rabbits from conventional breeding and husbandry were obtained for feeding the carnivores. These often did not meet the requirements: after thawing, the rabbits were often of mediocre quality with questionable feed value and the zoo's carnivores were not always convinced either which was reflected in poor acceptance.

An alternative to conventionally bred and kept rabbits was the collaboration with professional, regional, private rabbit breeders. This was the path taken by Lan-

dau Zoo. Animal welfare aspects were not only applied to the keeping of the animals by the breeders, but also to the transport of the animals to the zoo.

After careful inspection, the rabbits are anaesthetised, slaughtered and fed fresh or deep-frozen for later feeding. Thus, not only is nutritionally optimal, high-quality meat available; rather, the carnivores can be offered meat in its natural form: the whole animal body with skin and hair according to their taste.

Through the project, several things could be reconciled: The conservation of old, endangered rabbit breeds, high-quality, animal welfare-friendly feed for carnivorous wild animals and raising public awareness of old livestock breeds as well as the difficult but

important issue of keeping and feeding carnivorous wild animals in zoological gardens.

Bettina Müller, Verein zur Förderung der SAVE Foundation Schweiz

Sources:

Heckel, J.-O. (2022) Kann „Nutzung“ von Tieren deren Erhalt fördern? „(Gefährdete) Rassen“ erhalten durch „Auf(fr)essen“! Beispiel: Kaninchen; Vortrag; Interdisziplinäres VdZ-Symposium zum Erhalt alter Nutzierrassen, 22.11.-23.11.2022, Tierpark Nordhorn, Deutschland

Heckel, J.-O. (2023) persönliche Mitteilung

<https://zoo-landau.de/uber-uns/geschichte>

Empowering Livestock-Keepers: Agro-Eko Dibra's Successful Project in Korab-Koritnik Area, Albania

Under the inspiring leadership of Maksim Hajrullaj, Agro-Eko Dibra has initiated an ambitious project to support livestock keepers in the Dibër region and protect traditional methods of farming. With financial support and new models of farming offered by EuroNatur, the project selected three dedicated farmers in Maqellare, Melan and Kala Dodes administrative units, and equipped them with tools to maintain their herds and traditional lifestyle.

The biggest success of this project is it promotes sustainable use of animal husbandry as the main financial source of income by supporting local



Figure 1: Agrotourism in Korab-Koritnik area¹

farmers with the necessary tools, so that this traditional way of life is not lost, but is passed from generation to generation. The farmers have received and been trained to use photovoltaic elements to improve their conditions in lighting and hot water. They also created mini-camping - a new innovation for this region - and incorporated agrotourism in their

summer pasture activities (Fig. 1). The farmers spend almost six months of the year in the summer pastures, and their improved conditions represent a support that surpassed expectations.

The improved conditions for farmers through the support of EuroNatur, and with additional support from the Ministry of Agriculture, has improved the conditions for farmers in the Korab-Koritnik area by promoting the development of livestock, preventing abandonment of pastures, and helping experienced livestock farmers to stay in the area instead of migrating. A network of farms in the Korab-Koritnik area is currently being developed, where farmers are cooperating to improve their living conditions and ready themselves to serve tourists who seek agrotourism experiences.

The success of this inspiring project has spread to other farmers in the Korab-Koritnik Protected Area, who are now looking to follow in the model farmers' footsteps to advocate for their rights and protect their environment. Overall farmers in the region are now more engaged in the community and more willing to share their knowledge and experience with others.

The Ruda sheep, a traditional livestock breed kept in the Korab-Koritnik region

The farmers in the Korab-Koritnik region keep the Ruda breed, a traditional sheep breed (Fig. 2).² The Ruda breed stands out for its milk, meat, and wool, and for having a high traveling ability. The farmers included in the project primarily raise this sheep for its wool. The farmers' herds are usually between 100 - 300 heads of sheep. In general, the pastures of Korab-Koritnik are dominated by herds of sheep and very few cattle.



Height	Adult Ewe: around 55 cm Adult Ram: around 65 cm
Weight	Adult Ewe: around 45 kg Adult Ram: around 60 kg
Body	Long legs Usually half-fine, white fleece Neck and Abdomen are not covered with wool
Production Yield	Wool: 1.5 kg per season Milk: 90 kg (average of milk one sheep gives in a lactation period)

Figure 2: Ruda sheep in Korab-Koritnik and characteristics of the breed^{1,2}

The Ruda sheep is well adapted to the summer grazing areas during the months of May - October, using the mountain pastures. The pasture areas in the Korab-Koritnik region are very large with thousands of hectares, and this sheep is well suited to the environment and travelling long distances. Using the traditional livestock keeping practices, the farmers can keep them with very low costs. The Ruda sheep found in Albania is native to the Lumë Region. The Lumë region starts from Kërçinë

mountain peak on the border with North Macedonia (near the village of Maqellarë) to the area of Caj in Kukës, in the fields of the Korabi mountains.

The families of Dodës Castle in Dibër and the areas included in the project region of Korab-Koritnik are historically distinguished for having kept large herds of over 500 to 1000 heads, which in the winter they migrated to the coastal areas of Durrës, Lezhë, and Thessaloniki (Greece). But the social and economic changes after the 1960s and onwards brought drastic changes, where the number of heads has decreased by almost 50% and the number of young farmers is always smaller and smaller. Although the pasture area is significant in size and the native sheep are well suited to the conditions, their utilization today is not complete as a result of the reduction of herds and the departure of residents from rural areas to urban areas and emigration.

The support and economic and social policies of the livestock farmers from the Ministry of Agriculture leaves much to be desired to improve the situation for farmers. Support in the form of projects is limited only to the creation of some model projects, such as the case of the farmers supported by this project.

Stephanie Gentle, PPNEA – Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania

Maksim Hajrullaj, Agro-Eko Dibra

Sources:

¹ <https://ppnea.org/empowering-livestock-keepers-agro-eko-dibras-successful-project-in-korab-koritnik-area/?lang=en>

² Starova, A. and Wigger, S. (2021) Traditional Shepherding in the Sharr / Korab-Koritnik Mountain Range - An Ode to the Homegrown; Booklet, https://issuu.com/euronatur/docs/booklet_shepherding_e_n_web_final_27.01.2021

Foundation ProSpecieRara - 40 years for diversity

It all began with the spectacular rescue of the Swiss goat breed "Stiefelgeissen" (engl. boot goats). Since then, a lot has happened: over 5400 rare varieties and 38 old breeds are in the care of ProSpecieRara. In 2022, the foundation celebrated its 40th anniversary - among other things at the Animal Expo, which took place for the fourth time.

Flashback in time. In the autumn of 1983, the founder of ProSpecieRara, Hans-Peter Grünenfelder, visits an old goat shepherd in Quinten on Lake Walen who keeps a herd of the last of the boot goats. She promises to sell young animals to ProSpecieRara in the spring. In February, however, her son reports that the lady has fallen and is now in a nursing home, and

that ProSpecieRara can come by within 72 hours and take the animals. After that they would be gone. Since Quinten can only be reached by boat, a boat, transport vehicles and of course new owners have to be found quickly. In this way, about 15 animals suitable for breeding can be brought across the lake in time to form a new nucleus herd (Fig. 1 left).

Today, 40 years later, 37 other rare breeds of livestock animals are in the care of ProSpecieRara. The original team of three has grown to around 30 employees, spread over five locations throughout Switzerland (Fig. 1, right). The extended team also



Figure 1: The Swiss breed Stiefelgeissen (engl. boot goats) could be saved thanks to a spectacular boat trip across Lake Walen (left), The (almost complete) ProSpecieRara team from all over Switzerland. Not to be seen is the large network, which is essential for the conservation work (right)



includes the large network of 1,500 volunteer variety keepers and almost 2,500 livestock keepers, as well as many vegetable producers, restaurateurs and marketers. Without them, the conservation work of ProSpecieRara would not be possible.

The Tier-Expo (engl. Animal Expo) provided an opportunity to celebrate the 40th anniversary. Every five years, ProSpecieRara and the breeding associations invite visitors to the "national show of endangered livestock breeds" - and this was also the case in 2022. In the Vianco Arena in Brunegg, a total of 16,000 visitors were able to experience all 38 ProSpecieRara breeds up close - from the dark bee to the Valais sheep and the Freiburger horse. They all made an appearance in the straw arena, where breeders provided information about their animals to the public (Fig. 2).



Figure 2: A large group of representatives of the breed associations and volunteers strengthened the ProSpecieRara animal team and, together with the animal owners who made their animals available for the show, made it possible for the Animal Expo to take place.

For once, breeding technology remained in the background, the focus was on the fascination for the animals and the motivation of the breeders to keep and care for their animals. "The enclosures, in which the animals can move freely, deliberately do not create a classic livestock exhibition, but a celebration of the diversity of endangered farm animals," says

Philippe Ammann, Head of Division Animals at ProSpecieRara. "Animal lovers can give their hearts away here, and pet owners looking for a suitable breed can find out everything they need to know to make their choice directly from the experts.

Pigeons: an agricultural heritage

"Aargauer Weissschwanz", "Berner Guggler", "Luzerner Elmer": ProSpecieRara recently included six old breeds threatened with extinction in its conservation programme, all of them pigeons (Fig. 3). They were presented for the first time at the Animal Expo.



Figure 3: Rare pigeon breeds such as the Thurgau Elmer were once an integral part of many farms - ProSpecieRara therefore wants to campaign for their preservation.

The animals have a long agricultural tradition in the Swiss Plateau - pigeon lofts under the stable roof were once an integral part of many farms. The fact that pigeons largely looked for their own food - in fields that were harvested over a long period of time and where grain was always left lying around - made them attractive to keep. As the animals are very fertile, they were also a welcome addition to the menu, especially in times of crisis. Their aromatic and extremely digestible meat is still very popular with connoisseurs today.

In the course of industrialisation, pigeons disappeared more and more from farms. The aim of ProSpecieRara is to conserve their diversity of colours and breeds and perhaps to revive some of the empty pigeon lofts under the stable roofs.

Simone Krüsi, Stiftung ProSpecieRara

The SAVE Foundation warmly congratulates the ProSpecieRara Foundation on its 40th anniversary and looks forward to further cooperation.

Establishment of SAVE | DANMARK

Great news from the north: initiated by Susanne Hovmand SAVE | DANMARK has been officially established as NGO on the 26th of January 2023. SAVE | DANMARK focuses on preserving and perpetuating the living essence of Danish cultural heritage and its potentials for the future of Denmark. The organization focuses on ensuring the survival of endangered livestock, cultivated plants and wildlife in the Danish landscapes. SAVE | DANMARK will work for public education – and focuses on why it is important to preserve for the future; on the robustness, health-promoting capacity, diversity and distinctive flavours and characteristics, and on the crafts and practices that make good sense.



Figure: Traditional and rare Agersø Cattle enjoying their natural habitat in Denmark

Today, the preservation work is carried out on behalf of the whole of Denmark, primarily by a few enthusiastic private breeders who, over the years,

have tracked down and collected the last remnants of the endangered animals from all corners of Denmark to save them from extinction. But much greater efforts are needed. SAVE | DANMARK is working politically to change the framework conditions that can support cultural and food-related preservation and development - so more people can also participate.

The organization works for the animals and plants in their original and natural environment, to which they are genetically adapted and have historically been part of - now and in the future. SAVE | DANMARK looks forward to sharing much more information about its work and initiatives. You are welcome to support, follow and participate in the cause. SAVE | DANMARK is looking for foundations, sponsors, scholarships and donations to ensure the future of endangered species in Denmark and looks forward to co-operating with anyone who is interested in or is already working on the conservation cause.

Susanne Hovmand, SAVE | DANMARK

SAVE | DANMARK

<https://www.savedanmark.dk/>

The SAVE Foundation congratulates on the establishment of SAVE | DENMARK and wishes much success in the conservation of Danish livestock breeds, plant varieties and cultural landscapes.

Diversity in the microcosm - The seed microbiome

Plant parts are colonized by a variety of microbes which form the plant microbiome. The "life partnership" of the plant microbiome includes bacteria, fungi, archaea, algae and protists. The plant forms a structural and functional unit with the microorganisms which is called the holobiont. Due to the co-evolution of plants and microbes, the microbiome is species-specific and dependent on the developmental stage of the plant; however, it also adapts to the environment. Of extraordinary importance to plant growth is the formation of symbiotic communities

with a range of microorganisms. These plant symbionts mostly include bacteria and fungi, which are part of the holobiont.¹

Human-induced changes in the environment as well as intensive agriculture have an impact on the plant microbiome. For example, a significant increase in pathogenic fungi and infections has been observed which is contrasted by a decrease in plant symbionts.

Microbial inheritance in plants

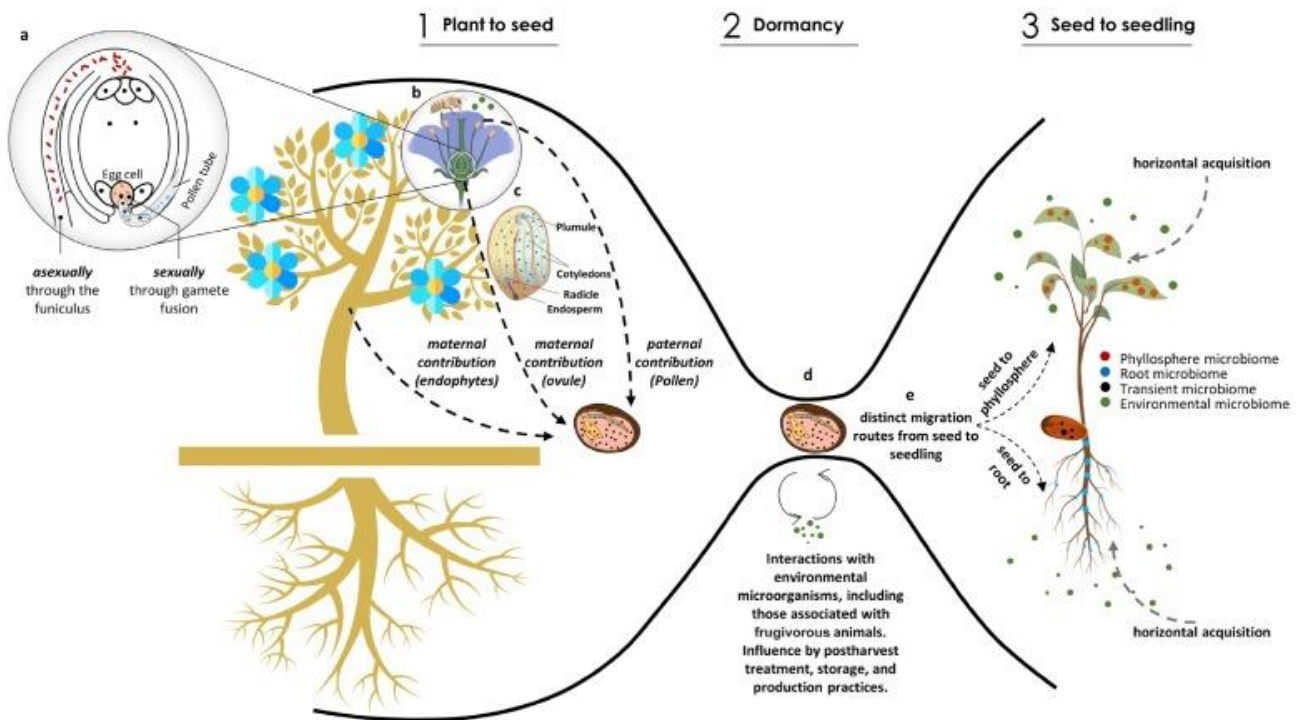


Figure 1: The inheritance of the plant microbiome
(courtesy of Dr. Ahmed Abdelfattah, ATB Potsdam)

This affects the diversity, abundance, and functionality of plant symbionts. It has been reported that symbionts are absent in modern crop varieties. In contrast, native plants can provide a reservoir of plant beneficial bacteria.¹

Microorganisms also colonize tissues within the seed (seed endophytes) and the seed coat (seed epiphytes). However, seeds harbor up to hundred times fewer microbial species than other plant parts. The number of microbial species in a seed can vary greatly depending on the plant species, ranging from a handful to a thousand microbial species. Some groups of microbial species are particularly abundant in seeds. These form the seed core microbiome. The seed core microbiome consists mainly of plant beneficial bacteria and is very important for plant growth. Breeding activities affected the composition and richness of the seed microbiome and chemical treatments of the seed also reduced bacterial diversity.²

The discovery of pathogenic fungi on seeds led to a radical treatment of seeds with physical and chemical methods. However, this approach resulted in the loss of some microbial taxa and also presumably in more susceptible plants due to the absence of the important function of the seed microbiome after treatment. Nowadays, on the contrary, it is considered that the seed is mainly colonized by microorganisms that are beneficial to the plant. Since the endophytes are located in the seed, they have a special feature:

they are transferred from the mother plant via the seed to the seedling; in other words: the endophytes are inherited (Fig. 1). Three stages are distinguished: the transfer of the microbiome from the plant to the seed, the phase of seed dormancy, and finally the transfer of the microbiome from the seed to the seedling.²

There are still some scientific knowledge gaps as well as technical hurdles regarding the cultivation of several microbiota taxa which currently refrain plant microbiota from targeted and widespread application in agriculture.¹

Bettina Müller – Verein zur Förderung der SAVE Foundation Schweiz

Sources:

¹ Berg, G., Schweitzer, M., Abdelfattah, A. et al. Missing symbionts – emerging pathogens? Microbiome management for sustainable agriculture. *Symbiosis* (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13199-023-00903-1>

² Abdelfattah A, Tack AJM, Lobato C, Wassermann B, Berg G. From seed to seed: the role of microbial inheritance in the assembly of the plant microbiome. *Trends Microbiol.* 2022 Nov 19;S0966-842X(22)00292-X. doi: 10.1016/j.tim.2022.10.009. Epub ahead of print.

If you would like to explore this topic in more depth, there is an online course on the microbiome¹: "Microbiome & Health" <https://imoox.at/course/microbiome>

January 1, 2023: Entry into force of the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union

The European agriculture faces many challenges. These were discussed at the Agricultural Outlook Conference in Brussels on December 8-9, 2022. This most important annual meeting around the EU's Common Agricultural Policy was attended by 500 people on-site and 3000 people online. The current challenges in the rural sector are manifold. For example, the number of farms decreased by 25% in the past ten years to 9.1 million in 2020. This was contrasted by an increase in the size of farms while mixing decreased. For example, the number of farms that both grow cereals and keep cattle decreased by

billion.² The new CAP has 10 objectives to make it fairer, greener and more social (Fig.1).²

Each of the 27 EU member states has drawn up a strategy plan with regard to the 10 objectives of the new CAP.* These country-specific strategy plans, which are tailored to the respective EU country and local conditions, are intended to implement the Common Agricultural Policy at country level.^{3,4}

Of the financial resources, 80% should contribute to environmental sustainability, this concerns 90% of the agricultural area in the EU. An example are

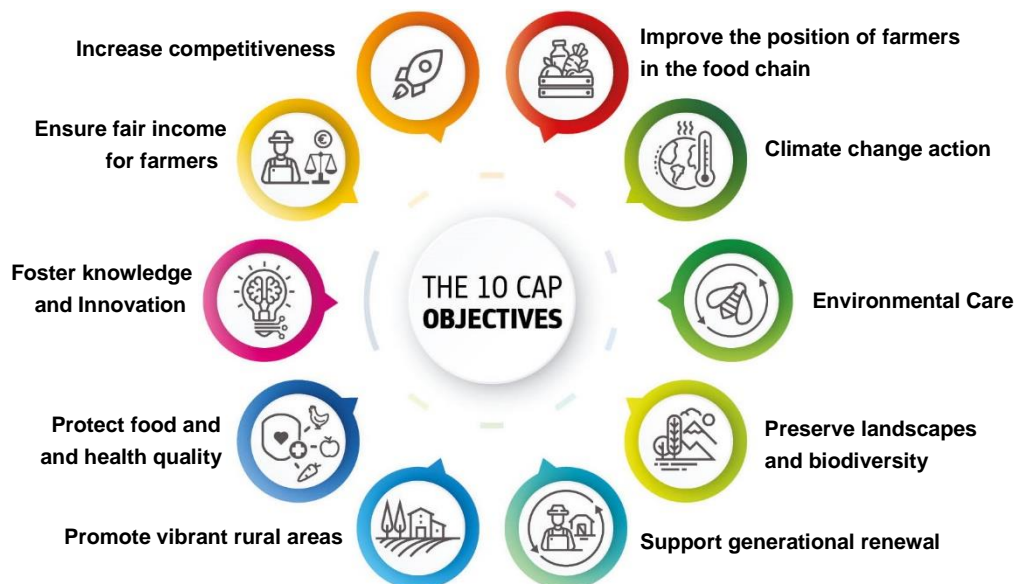


Figure 1: The 10 objectives of the new European CAP
(from Ref. 5, adapted)

42% over the last ten years. A rapid decline was recorded in the number of very small farms with less than 2 hectares. While the average age of farmers is increasing and is currently 57 years old, the number of young farmers between 25 and 44 years old is rapidly decreasing.¹

The EU is addressing these developments with the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which came into force on January 1, 2023. Key objectives are to promote and ensure sustainable agricultural incomes and the resilience of the agricultural sector. EUR 264 billion is to be invested in the promotion of a sustainable and resilient agricultural sector in the years 2023 - 2027. Co-financing and complementary national funding will bring the total to EUR 307

targeted measures for the preservation or restoration of biodiversity. This concerns 30% of the agricultural area of the EU.¹

Examples from the new European CAP

Small and medium-sized farms are to receive higher income support in 25 EU countries. This will take the form of a redistributive payment which amounts to 10.6% of all direct payments, corresponding to an annual sum of EUR 4 billion. **Young farmers** are to receive financial support to start up their agricultural business and to ensure that the business is maintained in the first few years after it is set up. A total of EUR 8.5 billion has been earmarked for this purpose. It is estimated that a total

of 377,000 new young farmers will start in full-time in the period 2023-2027. **Working conditions** on farms are to be improved and compliance with certain EU social and labor standards is a prerequisite for receiving CAP payments. At least **400,000 jobs** are to be created by making living and working in rural areas more attractive. Digital technologies and services to optimize resource efficiency will also be supported. By CAP funding **advice, training and knowledge exchange** will benefit more than 6 million people, or they will participate in **innovation projects** focusing on environmental and climate performance or social and rural aspects. The environment will also be taken into account with the new CAP: almost €98 billion will be allocated to measures that bring benefits to climate, water, soil, air, **biodiversity** and animal welfare. This means that 24% of direct payments are earmarked for ecoschemes. In terms of all plans, this means that 48% of the expenditure will be used to support environmental and climate objectives. The implementation of appropriate management measures, such as extensive grassland management or agroforestry, will be supported. By extending crop rotation, pest and disease cycles are to be broken and the use of pesticides reduced. Integrated pest management is to be introduced on more than 26% of the EU's agricultural land. Organic production is also to be strongly promoted. By the year 2030, organic areas are to account for between 5% and 30% in the individual EU member states.²

This is only a compilation of some data from the new CAP. Further information can be found in the sources listed below.

Bettina Müller, Verein zur Förderung der SAVE Foundation Schweiz

Sources and further information:

¹ <https://rural-interfaces.eu/news-or-events/cap-experts-discuss-eu-agricultural-outlook-as-strategic-plans-will-launch-on-january-1st/>

² New Common Agricultural Policy: set for 1 January 2023; press release of the European Commission, 14th December 2022; https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/de/ip_22_7639

³ https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/cap-2023-27_en

⁴ https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/cap-2023-27/key-policy-objectives-new-cap_en#briefs

⁵ https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/cap-2023-27/key-policy-objectives-cap-2023-27_en

* Note: For Belgium there are two strategy plans

Details of the ten specific objectives for each EU country: https://agridata.ec.europa.eu/extensions/DataPortal/analytical_factsheets.html

News in brief

SAVE Foundation Project Office: Successor takes over



On February 1, 2023, Waltraud Kugler, retired Project Director of the Association for the Promotion of the SAVE Foundation Switzerland, handed over to her successor, Dr. Bettina Müller. Bettina, a biologist with an MSc FHO in Engineering, has already settled in well and is looking forward to actively contributing to the preservation of agrobiodiversity as Project Director of the SAVE Foundation. Waltraud Kugler will remain with the SAVE Foundation: With a reduced workload, Waltraud will support the SAVE Foundation as Senior Consultant with her wealth of knowledge.

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