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Editorial

Livestock farming systems and their environmental impacts

Sustainability in livestock farming requires both sociological and ecological aspects to be included when considering animal production development. The increasing public awareness of the impact of farming, positive as well as negative, highlights the need for an improved understanding of such effects as well as the need for livestock farmers to be able to analyse and communicate the side effects of livestock farming to interested parties at all levels in a clear and understandable way. Grasslands and their management in livestock systems are a matter of particular importance in that respect. In addition to the general issues of biodiversity and habitat preservation, the challenges for grassland management vary according to the regional conditions. In areas with intensive livestock farming, grasslands are regarded as a tool for mitigating and limiting pollution; in harsher environments, where the past changes in livestock farming have led to a general decrease in their use, the questions are to find the ways to preserve the landscape amenity and the sustainability of local feeding resource.

This was the background for two joint sessions organised by The Livestock Farming System Commission at the 55th Annual Meeting of the European Association for Animal production in Bled, 2004. The themes of the sessions were:

- Grasslands for production, environment and landscape benefit and
- Indicators of environmental impact in livestock systems.

This special issue includes a number of presentations from these two sessions. The contributions give an overview of the current challenges for livestock farming systems in relation to societal needs related to environmental impact and landscape benefits, supply relevant tools to assess and communicate environmental side effects of livestock farming systems, and they illustrate measures to be taken advantage of in establishing a proper interaction between animal production and the environmental considerations.

We would like to thank the authors for their valuable contributions to this special issue. Special thanks also to all the referees, who were prepared to give constructive comments and suggestions for improving the papers in the review process.

It is very much appreciated that the Editor-in-Chief and the Editorial Board of Livestock Production Science created the opportunity to publish these articles.

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