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Dear friend of extensive sheep and goat farming!

We want to alert you to the EU rules on the electronic identification (EID) of sheep and goats, which aims to monitor their movements using dedicated software.

This most recent imposition on the world of farming is just the latest in a long list of standards and regulations which have tried to industrialise and homogenise the traditional practices of sheep and goat farmers and has gradually suffocated them over the past fifteen years.

The implementation of electronically-tagging livestock is meant to improve the management of health crises and to help achieve "food security", but the crises which threaten these are products of that very same industrialisation.

Not only does electronic tagging have many more problems and inconsistencies than benefits, but it just continues the trend of trying to bring the management of even extensive livestock into a model of society where all are under technology's control. This "technology of suspicion" means we lose just that little more autonomy.

However, we reject this last step in the transformation of our animals into commodities and demand the right to choose how to identify them. We reject mandatory EID and call for the support of the wider population in our stand.

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EID: the high road to patenting animals?

The mismanagement of Foot and Mouth Disease in the UK in 2001 is the pretext for the imposition of EIS. In 1998, the European Commission launched a "large scale project on the electronic identification of animals". After a transitional period of non-electronic double tagging of individual animals, EC Regulation No. 21/2004 of 17 December 2003 made it obligatory to identify all sheep and goats with two tags, one of which contains an electronic chip. Tracking the individual numbers of each animal at each stage of the food chain is now mandatory.

For cattle farmers, who are already required to monitor the movements of individual animals, electronic identification of animals is currently only voluntary – this could also have been the case for sheep and goats.

It is claimed that the new regulatory requirements improve the health of the industry: all animal data will now be listed electronically on a national basis through a server and software. Adherence to the rules is now tied to agricultural support payments through cross-compliance. The reality is that they add *nothing* to traceability, public safety or flock biosecurity.

Identifying their animals in accordance with the biosecurity rules is nothing new for sheep and goat farmers. Several officially-recognized means of identification have proven their effectiveness, including tags, necklaces, marks on the pastern and tattoos. In the 2001 crisis, France proved itself well able to contain the risk of contagion without the help of electronic chips – it did not even need double tagging to achieve this.

The tags are very fragile by design – something this fragile and simple will not prevent fraud. Moreover, tags frequently cause serious injury and suffering, with torn ears a common occurrence. This does not happen with rejected alternatives, such as the necklace or tattoo.

It also generates wider problems. Not least of these is the cost. The farmer needs to equip himself with a microchip reader, or delegate all the monitoring tasks to agents and traders. Between everything, the equipment can cost €1000 – a prohibitive amount which could easily rise. Time is also money – in order to tag the animals properly, farmers have to learn to use the hardware and software and fill out extra forms.

The sheep meanwhile suffers real pain, wholly contrary to the EU guidelines for the welfare of farm animals. Tagging at 7 days is likely to cause other health complications.

The bureaucracy of the system is monstrous; it will even lead to an increase in farm wastes. But most of all, it further impinges on the autonomy of farmers, tightening the net ever more on their freedom to choose the best technical and economic management practices for their farm.

A captive market for the chip and tag manufacturers does not bring any advantage to the breeder or for public safety, but is it a real economic boon for the pharmaceutical and biometrics which make the relevant products. Indeed these same businesses have sought to impose the chip as the only means of identification for over 20 years. Farmers do not wish to become subcontractors of these industries!

Making farmers conform to this industrial format is meant to stop the development of health crises; ironically, most of the recent health scares come from that part of the sector which is the *most* industry-like, such as Foot and Mouth Disease in the UK in 2001. Paradoxically it is these crises which are now serving as a pretext for the imposition of standards whose effect will be to eliminate all the non-industrial modes of production. Instead of celebrating their strengths, this system is founded on suspicion of the extensive farmer and of artisan products.

Control becomes the solution and farmers become merely the executioners of a non-autonomous model when technical choices are made for them by far-away vets. Compulsory vaccination against bluetongue (BT) in France was very illuminating - the "profession" mostly followed obediently, even demanding actions which shifted them towards 'high performance', 'technical' modes of production.

This is a pattern

For several years now, the net has tightened around sheep and goat farmers in France. Genotyping on the pretext of combating scrapie has been imposed now for over 10 years. The certification of all male ruminants is written into French law and will be applied from 2015 to all breeding males. The result could be dispossession, but in any case the rule represents the limiting of genetic diversity and of producers' freedom to use it at the hands of centralised administrators.

One direct result of the accumulation of regulations and obligations over the last twenty years has been an increase in the size of farms, a reduction in their number and a concentration of their geographical distribution. Husbandry practices have been profoundly changed by this forced evolution. It is therefore a step further decisive step towards the dispossession of our knowledge as farmers, most often replaced by techniques which bureaucracy's experts deems to be "good practice".

Given the content of the various amendments to Regulation 2004 in 2008 and 2010, the pattern is clear - the EU has clearly and quickly wants to make computerisation general in farming, with sheep and goats acting as guinea pigs once again.

It is almost unnecessary to spell out that the technical vision and standardised livestock systems advocated have shown themselves to be ineffectiveness in solving the economic problems of the sheepmeat sector in particular: lamb is being sold at well below the cost of production, and all the while the number of sheep farmers drops relentlessly. The "technical solution" has not worked for sheep. And yet, we have continued to promote and develop this model since at least 2008, sometimes with considerable vigour, as in the case of INRA in Clermont-Theix. Such campaigns try to convince farmers to use these gadgets for intensification and industrialisation.

Yet a 2008 report by Liam Aylward MEP on the crisis in the sheep sector, requested not only the postponement of the obligation to introduce EID for small ruminants, which is describes as expensive and poorly-considered, but also safeguards against the effects of unbridled competition.

Our opposition is not isolated: Germany, Hungary, the UK, Ireland, the Baltic States and Austria have already spoken out, demanding that electronic tagging of animals is introduced on a voluntary basis only. The federation of sheep breeders' unions of the German Länder has pointed out a number of inconsistencies to justify its refusal to chipping mandatory: difficulties in the use and control of the system; as yet unresolved questions concerning the recovery and disposal of chips and tags at

slaughter. Austria meanwhile enjoys a statutory exemption from this obligation because it has a national flock of less than 500,000 sheep and goats.

A model of society that we do not want

Electronic identification is the result of an administrative logic control which has consequences not only for farmers, but also for society as a whole. It is part of a powerful trend of mechanisation and computerisation of our whole lives: witness the widespread use of biometric technology (DNA biometric terminals in canteens, biometric ID cards), CCTV and so on... How long will it be before we microchip people?

Yes to the responsible management of farms, no to mandatory chipping!

Sheep and goat herders are the black sheep of agricultural modernisation, especially in terms of economic integration; they appear distrustful of cooperatives and similar groups. But this is explained by the chronic stagnation of incomes in their sector and the continued haemorrhaging of jobs peasants, which happens whether or not they 'integrate' themselves.

Many farmers have made choices which allow them to live with their animals, using complementary pastures through winter and summer transhumance, maintaining open landscapes and thereby delivering benefits to the public in the fight against wildfires, and often in the process working with wider society (negotiating grazing agreements with municipalities, for example). For these farmers, the cost of production and investment are limited. But they are in tune with the demands of society and some have opted for direct sales to enhance their income. They harm no-one.

Such independent self-reliant farming methods have their *raison d'être*, both economically and socially. These farming methods have no need of techniques such as EID, but rather the maintenance and reconstruction of small local abattoirs at the level of valleys or districts - that would do much more to ensure reliably safe food than such gadgets.

Though we denounce EID, we don't reject all forms of identification technology. What we reject is the "suspicion" that we do not control – we claim the right to achieve safety through our own methods, not through technologies we didn't choose and which don't make sense to us. Our cattle are not machines and we do not live in factories - we reject the transformation of our animals into mere goods.

Reject the call for mandatory chipping! Demand the freedom to choose appropriate methods of identification, respecting the obligation to identify, but achieving it by reliable means chosen by the farmer (whether it be tattoo, necklace...), and especially for producers who do not export (direct sellers, those using local sales, and so on).

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