

Dr Marie-Pierre PUECH
Vétérinaire – Sanitaire
19 avenue du Vigan
34190 – GANGES
FRANCE

mail : mppuech@mageos.com

NATURAL AREAS OF LANGUEDOC - ROUSSILLON IN FRANCE WITH OR WITHOUT TRANSHUMANCES, SEASONAL MIGRATIONS OF SHEEP ?

Future of the transhumances between Mediterranean and Mountains in the south of France

Focus on an unresolved regional problem
posed by epidemiological, regulational and political realities
with sheep transhumant flocks in the south
mixing with others during summer
and moving during the year (twice, sometimes more)
to follow the better place to graze
in an arid and extensive mediterranean area.

- Prospectives and social, economical and ecological implications
- ➔ Future management and regional, national and european development possibilities
- ➔ How to make progress together ?

1/ THE PROBLEM :

BRUCELLOSIS and TRANSHUMANCES PROBLEM SOLVING in FRANCE :

Sheep transhumances in Languedoc-Roussillon
are threatened now in 2003.

It's urgent to support the regional transhumant activities to prevent real
detrimental interactions between the natural and human environnement.

Future of the transhumant shepherds is uncertain because of ambiguous public health regulations about a serious infectious human disease :

the Brucellosis or Malta Fever

- Brucellosis is transmitted to human by stock (zoonosis) throughout Mediterranean basin
- an efficient recent vaccination of the young transhumant females, one time in their life, by conjunctival route, protect now all the European mediterranean area (South of France, Italy, Spain, and other Southern Europe sheep and goats breeding countries).
- In France, and in Montpellier Regional Hospital, the national reference center for Brucella, facts talk for themselves : human infection has completely disappeared in the past decade.
- The last great human infectious epidemic in our rural area was in 1986 in Ganges -40 Km North of Montpellier- with more than 130 human cases infected in this town with fresh goat and sheep cheeses.
- Now, it's the past : Brucellosis has been eradicated from the whole area, in both human population and stock bred extensively (sedentary meat or milk producing sheeps, milk goats, cows...).

In this sensible and large epidemiological area, only the transhumant young females are challenged once before they are 5 months with the conjunctival REV 1 vaccine ; this prevents very effectively and efficiently the circulation of the Brucella in the flocks, in their own flock first, and among all sensitive animals they can come across during their lives.

BUT

- Because of the globalisation of the agricultural economy, and its rigid rules and arguments, departemental animal breeding sanitary authorities in the Languedoc-Roussillon have decided, in agreement with regional farmer organisations, to forbid this vaccination on transhumant sheep starting this year 2003 in the departement of Hérault, with the others departements to follow.

This decision (prefectoral regulation) has been taken

- without any consultation between Human and Vet Public Health authorities.

- in infraction with the european sanitary regulation which require exhaustive vaccination in all the transhumant sheep (like still in PACA).
- and with local pressure on transhumant shepherds to have to choose to either stay at home or to follow the new regional regulations and have then all transhumance authorisations, including sanitary and administrative ones, allowing them to pass from one department to an other. They can't become sedentary : that's a meaningless -economical, biological and ecological- sentence.

Many questions and uncertainties have arisen now :

- How can this sanitary excellence obtained in such a short time in Human and Animal populations with such a serious zoonotic problem to start with, how can it be such an undesirable outcome in our landscape ?
- How can the transhumant activity, at last safe from transmitting Brucellosis thanks to the recent and efficient vaccination, be such a problem for the other farmers it comes across in its peregrinations ?

What sort of progress for our mediterranean land !

Now, there is a real risk to see other infectious epidemics emerge in animal flocks and in humans ; with, like in the past, contaminated animal slaughterings, even in threatening recently reinforced rustic sheep breeds, and severely limiting transhumances possibly responsible for their disappearance, and...with also all collateral effects and interactions with other sensible animals in the close environnement.

- Last question, not the least :
Are transhumances still needed by our community ?
 - if it's no : how will we manage such arid, large and bushy extensive areas ?
 - and if the answer is **YES**, ie transhumances have a place in our southern territories, then how do we support **HERE** and **IMMEDIATLY** this endangered activity, and how do we connect it to our Southern Europe economic an human development project ?

2/ SOME SOLUTIONS IN KIND OF CONCLUSION :

This sanitary and statutory problem on our regional transhumant pastoralism is very symptomatic of uncertainties, difficulties and challenges for our regional and european development : how can we improve creative and new managements of such complex and complicated territory ? Biodiversity, agricultural and human evolution are in the balance.

MEDITERRANEAN NATURAL AREAS

WITH OR WITHOUT TRANSHUMANCES ?

WITH ? How then technically can we do with such a distrustful and excluded professional activity ? How can we progress together ?

WITHOUT ? Beware of the abandonment of this pastoral and territorial management. We are all in the same world, in daily interactions ; environment and ecosystem are not closed or isolated. Three examples must bear in mind of possible related problems with such technical or social abandonment : fire, brucellosis or wolf -or any other predator- management in the mediterranean dry, bushy and hilly areas.

Richness of biodiversity, good health of environment and economical development are connected with human and natural factors.

Which future regional, national or european management solutions can be adapted to these targets ?

Transhumant shepherd in Southern Europe : which modern project can we build together in future ?

- a) **the rule** : change the rule to fit the best way to improve our collective richneses.
- b) **the formation** : individual and permanent professional formations in commune interests : how can we think protect and conserve the nature and its biodiversity without motivating local actors or attempting to share the knowledges and the interests ?

c) **the economical development** : transhumance and transhumant shepherds are not relics of the past in Europe ; we must be all convinced of their relevance and real economical, qualitative and ecological adaptation. **The modern targets are now to learn around us, invent and produce together High Nature Value agricultural and breeding wealths. We must learn to share the territory for an solidary economical development, rich of its qualities and (bio)-diversity.**

Two different strategies and works are to advance now :

- **one, local and regional** : where we need to develop, reinforce and show the HNV linked with the transhumance, from the producer to the consumer, between cities and natural spaces and... the policy makers. We need to develop and communicate on the concept of high quality food products, but also on the environmental and social requirements.
- **and the other**, european development of such HNV agriculture must be argued among the european economical and social projects.

The EFNCP seems to go in a quite good experimentative way. This 8th Forum in Montpellier - France was very rich in discussions and meetings in different levels. Thank for all the organizers and... see you later.

For the cevenol transhumant shepherds and sheep,
Dr M-P Puech