

“WE ARE WHAT WE REPEATEDLY DO” THE EXPERIENCE OF ASSAF BREEDERS ASSOCIATION WITH ICAR CERTIFICATION OF QUALITY

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The associations of breeders of purebred sheep in Spain have carried out important work in genetic improvement programs whose impact is now perceived by the farmer, public administrations and consumer. In the case of ASSAFE (national breeders association of Assaf breed) the genetic development obtained is mostly due to the strong commitment of the breeders themselves, in close collaboration with INIA-CSIC (Agricultural Spanish Research and technology institute) and ULE (University of León) in genetics, laboratories for paternity tests (“Xenetica Fontao”, and “Animal Breeding Consulting” (ABC)), milk control organizations (UAGCYL) and OVIGEN (Center for selection and genetic improvement of sheep and goats of Castilla and Leon). All data collection processes, which allow genetic valuation to be offered to the farmers, are subject to be controlled. At the proposal of the Ministry of Agriculture and with the support of INIA-CSIC, the quality certification process with ICAR began in 2020. An extensive and detailed ICAR questionnaire was completed, followed by a subsequent visit to analyze the processes of electronic animal identification, dairy control, herd book, mammary morphology, the genetic valuation of the characters subject of selection; and the way in which data was processed within the association.

In the specific case of ASSAFE, after 20 years of work, there were more than 700,000 animals registered in its genealogical book, 7 million milk controls, 1 million lactations and more than 350,000 paternity tests performed.

The most important advantage of the audit carried out by ICAR for ASSAFE has been primarily the increased awareness that the ASSAFE team has gained about the relevance of our own internal processes; especially those related to the need of a strict control of data, and the need to establish specific control points throughout the process. This has allowed us to better understand our own work procedures, even encouraging us to rewrite them in some cases, with the aim to embrace a culture of continuous improvement; which has been the germ for embarking ourselves on a quality certification process (ISO Standard) that is already ongoing.

Externally, our certification by ICAR has had a triple advantage. In the first place, in our relationship with the central and regional administrations, by transmitting them a perception of a solid culture of continuous improvement and quality embracement within our organization. Secondly, the feeling of quality that we are now able to transmit to the customer, including the final consumer (of milk or meat), the producer who acquires animals belonging to the association members; and the future farmers who will be increasingly encouraged to be part of the breeder associations. Thirdly, this certification has also served as a guarantee of the services that the association provides to external customers, who hire consultancy services from the association for their exploitations.

Keywords: dairy sheep, breeders association, quality certificate, Assaf breed, Assafe