RECOVERY AND VALORIZATION OF ANIMAL TRACTION POWER AS AN ECOLOGICAL RENEWABLE ENERGY SOLUTION

European Draught Horse Federation FECTU is one of the associated Organizations of the European Technology Platform of TP Organics.

FECTU was established in Luxembourg in 2003 as a federation of organizations which promotes the recovery of animal traction power and boasts partners representing different European countries. The Association contributes to the preservation of the European common heritage in respect of draught animals, paying particular attention to good practices regarding animals and humans involved, as well as the environment.

The workhorse is being re-evaluated as a source of energy that has been used for thousands of years and also that is both infinitely renewable and completely eco-friendly. With the growing European interest in ecological issues and the danger of losing various breeds of domestic animals, FECTU coordinates the efforts being made to encourage an increased use of animal traction as a modern and effective means of work power as well as its good management.

The Federation stresses that animal traction is a viable sustainable development solution for the future as:

- It represents a human-sized technology; it is accessible in the most remote regions of the earth, it is economic for all users, it facilitates agricultural labour and allows people to dedicate saved time to other activities.
- It is independent from fossil fuels, spare parts, distributors and retailers.
- It develops self-sufficiency and food independence, and safeguards social and family's structures in rural farming areas.
- It facilitates local and regional transport systems and trade.
- It contributes to the sustainable management of agricultural land, forests and environmentally sensitive zones and helps to preserve biodiversity areas.

Compared to other man developed technologies, animal traction, from an ecological point of view, is the best way of transforming energy into useful work. The workhorse does no harm to the environment and harmoniously integrates into the natural world. Horse power is another way to transform solar energy. The energy source (horse food) is produced directly on the farm making farmers independent from buying animal feed. In fact, horses make use of converted solar

energy (in the form of grass and grains without needing to be expensively processed thus losing much of its value from the point of view of energy balance). In contrast to bio-fuels, the use of horse power represents a real alternative for the use of renewable raw materials. In this sense, a horse is the most modern ecological tool available.

In European countries the number of farms that rely on animal traction is still small but yet growing as the use of workhorses ties with the expanding principles of Bio-agriculture. The German association of workhorses, known as IGZ, published in 2007 an interesting study and a list of 89 German farms using workhorses for farm work in organic farms. An increased interest in the use of horses in agriculture and gardening is also being experienced in other European countries.

Studies of relevant interest are being developed to evaluate the benefits deriving from traction animals compared to the use of modern technologies in relation to farm sized and availability of agricultural land. These studies demonstrate that animal traction for small farms are a highly efficient solution that contributes to their economic sustainability.

In other European countries, animal traction is also recovering for other purposes as part of new ecological trends which promote the heritage of indigenous resources and biodiversity. In 2011, for example, UNESCO recognized Brittanny Region (France) traditional horse as an intangible cultural heritage. Also thanks to this recognition, various initiatives are now being undertaken in this region to imply this horse breed in the management of community services. These creative initiatives undoubtedly contribute to agriculture, but also make local territories and historical centres become more attractive for residents and tourists.

It is estimated that more than 300 million traction animals are used worldwide to work in agriculture and for other services to the population. The Federation develops its work to preserve and enhance these important resources for sustainable development.

To know more

FECTU website

Hippotese (France)

Arbeidshesten (Norway)

APTRAN - Portugal

Asociación La Esteva - Spain