

---

---

## Concluding remarks

*M. Zjalic*

*EAAP, Via Nomentana 134, 00162 Rome, Italy*

---

In Central and Eastern European countries cattle identification and milk recording have a long history: in the major part of countries they were put in practice in the period between the two world wars or even at the beginning of this century. Performance control methods and systems as a base of animal breeding and improvements in production traits followed changes in economic and social environment as well as in breeding objectives and technologies. Transition from the centrally planned economic to the market oriented systems, accompanied with privatization of production assets, the changed role of the state and, in majority of countries, the establishment of new farm structures, have imposed the need for adjustments and changes in the general approach, funding and methods of work of services and organizations involved in animal recording. The attainment of general policy objectives, such as broader integration in the world market, require the implementation of norms and standards developed by the competent international organizations and approved by the major subjects in the international trade. Like in many other activities, the integration in the European Union, adopted as a policy objective by a majority of countries concerned, require a harmonization of methods and standards in cattle identification with EU norms and practices.

In coping with these complex problems, recording services in CEE countries have acquired a wealth of experience and knowledge. Although conditions and problems vary from country to country, some general principles have been found valid for all or for a group of countries in the sub-region. The experience of West European and North American organizations has been used to a maximum possible extent in developing solutions adapted to local conditions. A substantial technical and financial support provided by the international governmental and non-governmental organizations played an important role in the process of transition and adaptation of animal recording according to new conditions.

For these reasons, the ICAR initiative to organize a round table on cattle identification and milk recording in Central and Eastern European countries was welcomed by its member organizations from this part of the world. It was supported by the FAO (Sub-Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Animal Production Division) and by the European Association for Animal Production as an action complementary to their programmes in support of restructuring the animal production sector in CEE countries.

The Round Table has met all expectation of participants and organizers. An overview of the current status of milk recording, cattle identification and registration in ICAR member and non-member countries in Central and Eastern Europe has been presented in country papers published in this publication. In addition, an open and fruitful discussion that followed each presentation offered a variety of views and proposals for more efficient work at country level as well as for the improved international cooperation in this field.

As can be seen from the papers submitted at the Round Table, in all countries of the Central and Eastern Europe there are well organized and functional milk recording services. From the organizational point of view, the major part of them is established as independent entities operating under the license issued by the Ministry of Agriculture. They apply ICAR guidelines and control methods in accordance with the local conditions, farm size and costs of operations.

In principle, costs of milk recording are paid by producers. Fees paid by producers vary. In general, they depend mainly on the herd size: they are lower in countries with large herds and higher in countries characterized by small production units. However, participants at the Round Table have recognized the possibility of decreasing costs to producers by improving quality and efficiency of services offered by recording organizations. In this respect, they have underlined the importance of the adequate implementation of ICAR's guidelines as minimum requirements for uniformity of recording combined with maximum flexibility in the choice of methods.

A decisive role of the state in promoting cattle identification and milk recording and in providing direct support to recording activities has been recognized by all participants. In the majority of countries, the state supports milk recording activity through subsidies for regular operations, the direct provision of equipment and training of staff. The animal recording and particularly animal identification in CEE countries contribute to the provision of public goods, such as protection of human health and protection of consumers. Participants felt that the process of transition from the state supported into an economically self-relying system should be carefully managed taking care of public interest and importance of identification and recording activities. In the future, customers - breeders

should cover the major part of costs of recording, but that at least a part of identification and recording activities should be financed by the state. A declining state support and the tendency to reduce budgetary expenditures impose the search for additional sources of income primarily by enlarging the scope of recording to cover some aspects of the health and nutritional status of herds and individual animals (e.g. somatic cell count, urea content). Several impressive examples of introduction of new products and services as well as of experiences in implementing the most up-to-date data processing methods are to be found on previous pages of this publication. They will certainly inspire other colleagues for similar undertakings.

Recording organizations from a number of countries operate under difficult conditions, particularly with regard to the technical quality of the available equipment. However, as expressed by participants at the Round Table, they are striving to make the best use of the available equipment, often out-dated, and to provide their clients with services of the highest possible quality. In some cases, the external financial and technical assistance was a decisive factor in up-grading the quality and accuracy of recording.

Participants reached a unanimous conclusion regarding the cattle identification issues. They recognized that the EU directive, although binding EU members only, was to be implemented in all ICAR member countries of the sub-region, particularly in view of their trade relations with the UE countries and/or their potential admission to the Union. In this respect, they plead for the unified system based on the life-long ID number which would be equally valid and applicable for health control and breeding purposes. In order to avoid additional costs to producers, the existing systems and data bases should be used to the maximum possible extent and combined with new requirements. In this respect, bearing in mind that the situation in CEE countries does not differ from the one in Western Europe, a close cooperation among all countries concerned and coordinated approach under the aegis of ICAR was recommended.