



Spanish dairy sheep breed associations were granted with the ICAR Certificate of Quality

J.M. Astruc¹, F. Freire², R. Gallego³, T. Lopez⁴, L. Mintegi⁵, E. Couto⁶, A. Calavia⁷, F. Tejerina⁷ and C. Diaz⁸

¹IDELE, Castanet-Tolosan, France

²ASSAFE Assaf, Zamora, Spain

³AGRAMA Manchega, Albacete, Spain

⁴ANCHE Churra, Palencia, Spain

⁵CONFELAC, Latxa, Vitoria, Spain ⁶ICAR, Utrecht, the Netherlands

⁷Ministry of Agriculture, Madrid, Spain

⁸INIA, Madrid, Spain

Corresponding Author: Jean-Michel.Astruc@idele.fr

In 2020, FEAGAS (Spanish federation of breeding organisations) applied for the ICAR Certificate of Quality for four Spanish dairy sheep associations, under the patronage of the Ministry of Agriculture and the support of INIA-CSIC (Agricultural Spanish Research and Technology Institute). As it was the first application, a visited audit was scheduled in autumn 2020. But the Covid pandemic made necessary to cancel the visit on site at the last moment. The usual process was therefore adapted in an agile and unexpected way, in agreement with all the parties, ICAR, the breed associations members of FEAGAS, and INIA-CSIC, by replacing the visits with video conference to review the documents prepared by the associations. The visited audit was delayed to the year after, in 2021. The associations audited, members of FEAGAS, were the main four dairy sheep breed associations in Spain: AGRAMA for the Manchega breed, ANCHE for the Churra breed, ASSAFE for the Assaf breed and CONFELAC for the Latxa breed. The scope of the audit covered the 6 possible fields: animal identification, herdbook recording, milk recording, conformation recording, genetic evaluation, and data processing. The documentary audit consisted in four 3-hours-meetings in videoconference, with each of the four associations. It permitted an efficient review of the documents, bridge the gaps, answer all pending questions. This was a useful preparatory step for the in-person visits to audit scheduled the year after. In 2021, the visited audit was undertaken in each association, with one day per association, including a comprehensive review of the processes, and discussion with the breed managers and stakeholders, as well as a milk recording visit on-farm. The visits were completed by an informal meeting with INIA-CSIC and the Ministry of Agriculture to discuss the first main impressions that struck the auditor during his visits. Finally, the four associations audited were granted the ICAR Certificate of Quality for all the activities. This Certificate of Quality recognizes the high standards followed by the associations work, allowing them to produce output and services of quality for the farmers. Besides, as the aim to shift towards genomic selection is shared among the four Spanish dairy sheep breed associations, the audit was an opportunity to address this concern and to suggest that an increase in the coordination at the national level, by exchanging, harmonising, stimulating, might improve the benefits for each of the associations.

Abstract

Keywords: dairy sheep, Certificated of Quality, breed association, Spain.

Introduction

Spain has the fourth dairy sheep population among European countries (behind Romania, Greece and Italy) and its dairy sheep breeds are improved through breeding programs with large population in performance recording. The Spanish federation of breeding organisations (FEAGAS), which is the Spanish ICAR member, applied in 2020 for the ICAR Certificate of Quality (CoQ) for four dairy sheep associations (as well as for 7 beef cattle associations). The audit took place during the Covid pandemic period, that obliged the stakeholders (ICAR, the auditor and the associations themselves) to adapt the scheduling and the agenda accordingly. This paper obviously does not aim to give results of the audit. The focus is to present the background of the audited associations, the necessary adaptations required regarding the Covid restrictions and the feeling and experience of the auditor in such a situation.

Audited organisations

- FEAGAS, which is the only Spanish ICAR member, is the Federation of the Spanish breeding organisations. FEAGAS applied for the ICAR Certificate of Quality for the first time in 2020, for dairy sheep and for beef cattle. In dairy sheep, the application concerned the four following associations:
- ASSAFE (“Asociacion Nacional de Criadores de Ganado Ovino de Raza Assaf”). ASSAFE is the Association of the Assaf breed and its head office is located in Zamora (Castilla y Leon).
- ANCHE (“Asociacion Nacional de Criadores de Ganado Ovino Selecto de Raza Churra”). ANCHE is the Association of the Churra breed and its head office is located in Palencia (Castilla y Leon).
- CONFELAC (“Confederación de Asociación de Criadores Ovinos de Raza Latxa y Carranza”). CONFELAC is the Association of the Latxa and Carranzana breeds and its head office is located in Vitoria (Euskadi).
- AGRAMA (“Asociacion Nacional de Criadores de Ganado Ovino Selecto de Raza Manchega”). AGRAMA is the Association of the Manchega breed and its head office is located in Albacete (Castilla la Mancha).

Background on Spanish dairy sheep breeds applying for the ICAR Certificate of Quality

Among the countries with the largest populations, Spain is the first country in terms of official milk recording in sheep, before France and Italy (Table 1). 15% of the whole population of ewes are recorded (Astruc *et al.*, 2022). The audited breed associations manage some of the largest dairy sheep breeds in terms of both the recorded populations and the impact of milk recording (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of dairy sheep in official milk recording in France, Spain, Italy (from Astruc et al., 2022).

Breed	Country	Recorded population	% ewes in milk recording
Lacaune	France	192,900	17%
Assaf	Spain	141,000	14.1%
Manchega	Spain	136,000	13.6%
Sarda	Italy	115,500	3%
Manech tête rousse	France	84,300	30%
Latxa	Spain	72,000	26.3%
Churra	Spain	26,000	8.9%
	Spain	375,000	10.9%
	France	341,000	20.9%
	Italy	171,700	3.3%

This was the first application from FEAGAS to ICAR CoQ. Hence, it was due to be a visited audit. The audit concerned all the possible fields of activities: animal identification; milk recording; herdbook recording; conformation recording; data processing; genetic evaluation.

The audit was initially planned for October 2020. When the pandemic broke out in early 2020, we kept the planned schedule, which was to be held for one week, with one day per association (on site) and one day for feedback (in Madrid).

Finally, as the pandemic went on and the restrictions were strong, the decision was taken in September to cancel the visits. We then had to promptly set up a practical adaptation: we decided together with INIA, the four associations, members of FEAGAS, and ICAR to keep the dates and replace the visits with video conference to review the documents sent by the associations. Therefore, this part of the audit consisted in four 3-hours-meetings in videoconference, with each of the four associations. The visited audits were postponed to 2021.

Running the audit: initial agenda and necessary reorganisation due to COVID

Four 3-hours-meetings in videoconference, with each of the four associations audited were held, within the same week, to review the documents sent by the associations. The documents (regular questionnaire for ICAR audit and additional materials) had been filled out and sent to the auditor prior to the meeting. The meeting started with a presentation of the association. Then the documents were comprehensively reviewed, in relation with the ICAR guidelines (ICAR guidelines-section 16, 2022). For each association, several persons were present to deal with the various activities of the audit). This step of remote interviews generated two outputs: first, the documents were updated accordingly so that the documents were more complete and more precise for preparing the visited audit. Second, a first general report (covering all associations) was produced for FEAGAS to get first feedback. This feedback, shared with the associations, was useful during the visited audit next year. At the end of this week of meetings, a remote presentation of dairy sheep genetics and genomics in France was given by the auditor to a large audience. This was a good way to better know each other and to exchange on one of the hot topics that underpinned the ICAR CoQ application in Spanish dairy sheep.

2020: remote interviews

2021: visited audits

With the improvement of the COVID situation, the visited audit could take place on the first week of October 2021 (1 year after the remote audit), with the following organisation: one day par association, and a working dinner in Madrid with INIA and Ministry of Agriculture, to bring first feedback. Each association organised a field visit (Figure 1), either a participation to an on-farm milk recording (Churra, Assaf, Manchega) or a visit of an artificial insemination centre (Latxa, Assaf). In addition, around three hours were spent in the association office to review the whole process, browse the documents once again (clarification, complements, discussion), and go through questions and answers, including on pending issues following 2020 remote audit.

All the visits were very useful and informative for the auditor as there was a strong commitment of each association. It was possible to have a good insight on the process regarding the audited activities and on the practical questions such as the milk recording operations.

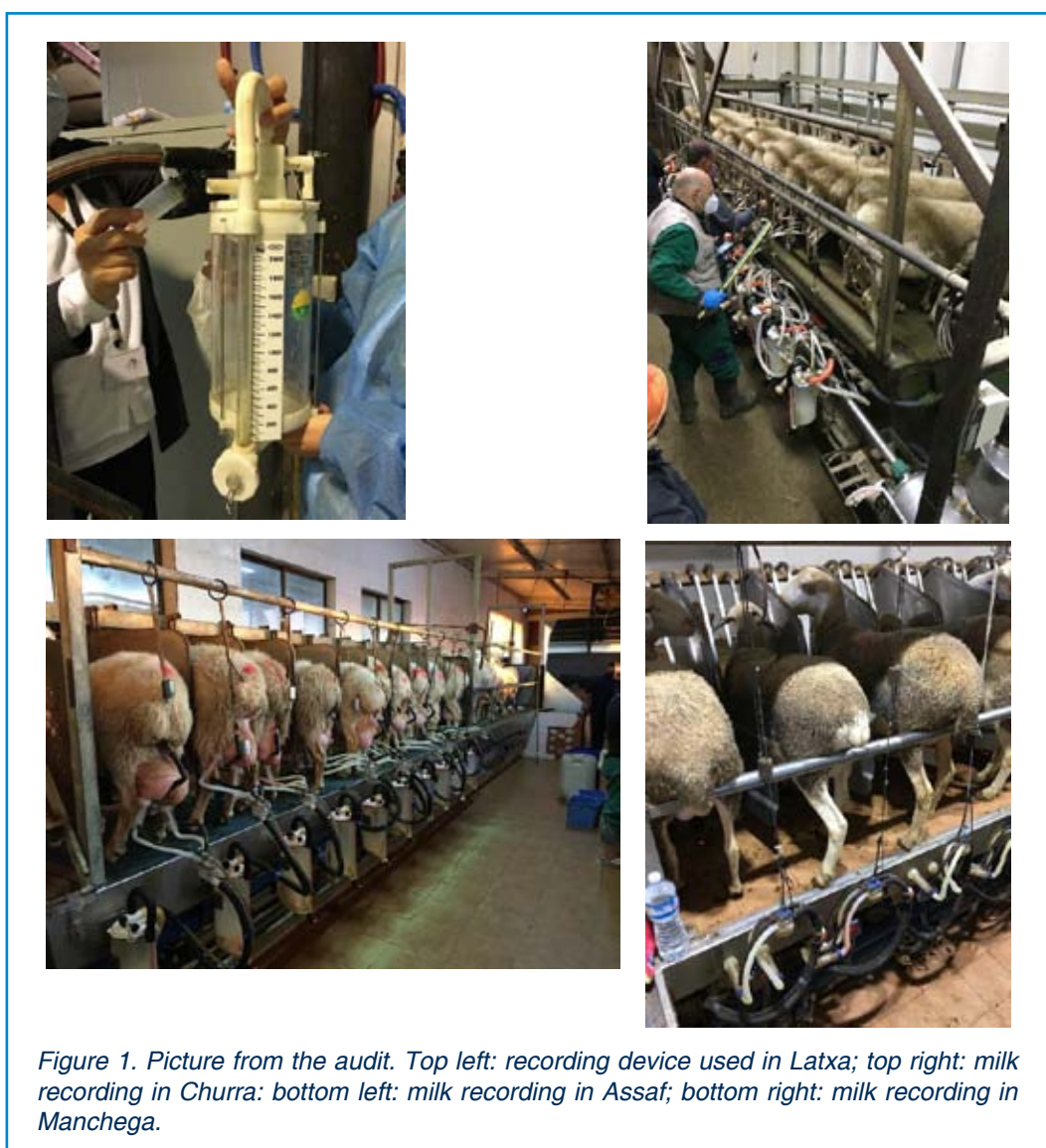


Figure 1. Picture from the audit. Top left: recording device used in Latxa; top right: milk recording in Churra; bottom left: milk recording in Assaf; bottom right: milk recording in Manchega.