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## Foreword

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to Slovakia, welcome to Nitra a centre of the Slovak agriculture. Our agriculture undergoes a very difficult period of transformation. Its course can be speeded up and probably also facilitated by the supply of topical knowledge. Since 1989 we go for them out into the whole world. However, we are glad if the knowledge comes to us. Thank you for accepting the invitation of the organisers and taking part in this conference. I was informed that one half of the guests came from abroad and most of them came from the countries of EU and the USA. Even this fact gives evidence of our struggle to be associated to the European Union. I am convinced that the authority of our scientific workers and institutes stimulated you to participate in this conference.

Our research institutes take active part in the international scientific and technical co-operation. The Research Institute for Animal Production, in the facilities of which this conference takes place, has also great experience with international activities. It is the seat of the international laboratory for bio-technologies. It co-operates with many outstanding scientific institutions abroad. A number of research workers from Nitra take part in short-lasting as well as long-lasting experiments abroad, and foreign researchers are often here. The Institute works at a project within 5th Frame program although the researchers from Nitra would like to be more successful in it.

International film festival Agrofilm is organised in the Institute every year. There were presented more than 2300 films with agricultural, food and ecological topic from 72 countries.

The Institute is also represented in international organisations. The director of the Institute was member of the Council of the European Association for Animal Production for 9 years, out of them 4 years its Vice-President. Chairman of the organising committee of this conference is the member of the Sub-committee of the International Committee on Animal Recording under the auspices of which is this conference realised. I would like to express my thanks for it to the Vice-President of ICAR Mr. Andrea Rosati who is present in person.

The second half of the participants are the Slovaks. It also shows our interest in knowledge. Welcome to Nitra.

The area of Slovakia is very heterogeneous. If you came from Vienna, you saw its fertile part. Here at Nitra is the first small hill and from here to the north and east run the ranges of our mountains. Agricultural land represents about 50 % of the area of our country. Only 32 % is arable land. I come from a submontane region and I can tell you that the agricultural production is performed there with great difficulty. Our agricultural policy established by law respects the geographico-climatic conditions. It is our interest the agriculture be a part of the landscape, its co-creator. Therefore we devote great attention to the ecological influence of agriculture. However, at the same time we are able to produce products of competitive price in intensive regions. The structure of our agricultural subjects is heterogeneous. There are large enterprises with the average area 1 200 ha, which cover 71 % of total acreage of our agricultural land, and individual farmers with average acreage 10.5 ha.

It is not possible to explain the whole philosophy of transformation of our agriculture in this short address. Nevertheless, I hope the Slovak participants of the conference will be able to do so during the discussions between the sessions and during the social evening.

Allow me some remarks on the conference topic. I esteem persons who are engaged in obtaining of milk. I am a politician, however, I was engaged in the agricultural production more than 20 years and therefore I know it very well. I consider milking a very exacting process mainly from the social and economic point of view. You will deal first of all with the relation of biology and technique during the conference. I hope that the results of your research will become evident in the social and economical sphere also. I wish you a nice stay in Slovakia and success for the sessions.

Pavel Koncos  
Minister of Agriculture of the Slovak Republic