



The Lagunaire *an endangered breed of cattle*



Lagunaire breed of cattle in Côte d'Ivoire

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Context

The African continent abounds with a great animal genetic diversity represented in cattle by two species: the zebu or *Bos-indicus* and the taurin or *Bos-taurus* with at least 22 different breeds. These genetic resources play an important role in the economy, social and food security, with specific characteristics based on the valuation of marginal agro-ecological zones and resistance to diseases, which has allowed the development of livestock in certain hostile regions of West Africa and beyond.

Habitat

Lagunaire cattle are found on the coastal countries of West Africa. In Côte d'Ivoire, it is found particularly in the Southern zone (Cercle des lagunes, Adzopé, Agboville, Alépé), the Littoral (Dabou, Toupa, Jacquerville, Sassandra, Lahou and Tabou) the regions of Aboisso (Southeast) and the Indénié (East). In Togo the breed is found in the South, up to 50 km within the country. In Benin, it is found in the South in the Mono, Ouémé and Zou provinces. Most of the habitat consists of wooded savannas, pastures under coconut groves and under palm plantations, and fallow land bordering the coastal lagoons of these countries. The breed was also introduced in the DRC (Ecuador region), Gabon and Congo in the early 1900s. A small population is also found in southeastern Ghana near the Ada lagoon Keta.

Presentation of the breed

The Lagunaire breed is of small size with a height at the withers of 80 to 100 cm and has an adult weight of 100 to 180 kg. The Lagunaire is a rectilinear and brevilinear type of animal with a fairly uniform conformation. The head is thick with a flat forehead. Hanging or missing horns are crescent or crocheted. Black, often associated with wild and dark wheat, is the most common color of the dress. The Lagunaire breed has no definite aptitude, except the one to be remarkably adapted to its environment, where the parasitic diseases to which it is resistant proliferate.



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Lagunaire breed of cattle in Togo

It is also an animal of passive character and gentle temperament, enjoying living around houses like goats. Therefore, Lagunaire is particularly suitable for farmers who have never possessed cattle and fear the contact of horned cattle. The study of age at first calving and interval between calving in the Lagunaire cow provides interesting results, notably on the effect of non-genetic factors (the effect of year of birth on age at first calving, the effect of the calving season, the year and the lactation number on the interval between calving). The Lagunaire cow seems to be late mature, but has the advantage of a short calving interval. This decrease in the interval between calving and thus the interval between generations could accelerate the genetic progress.

Genetic improvement and conservation program

In general, governments seem to be unaware of the value of safeguarding this breed and genetic improvement and conservation programs for the breed are currently non-existent. No national breeding program for the Lagunaire breed has been developed. Limited research programs have been developed for the breed and it is not taken into account by national livestock development programs. The breed is kept in situ in private farms in traditional, semi improved, expanding and modern ways. Some farms or research stations keep the Lagunaire breed for conservation and promotion. Activities are currently being carried out in national centers for promotion and research of livestock in Côte d'Ivoire, Benin and Togo in collaboration with the International Center for Research and Development on Sub-humid Zone (CIRDES, Bobo-Dioulasso) for the maintenance of biodiversity and the conservation of the breed.

Why keep the breed?

The Lagunaire breed of West Africa is remarkable because of its adaptability and trypanotolerance, but the breed remains poorly studied and is threatened with extinction. There is a tendency for breeders to systematically cross the breed with exotic ones to increase the size and productivity of animals to



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Lagunaire breed of cattle in Benin

the detriment of trypanotolerance and resistance to certain diseases. Due to its low productivity in meat and milk, national and international programs have worked for years to improve the performance of tropical farming by using better performing animals. The situation is alarming for the Lagunaire breed because it is endangered in all the countries where it is encountered (Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Burkina Faso, Benin and Mali). The main factor in the disappearance of the Lagunaire cattle breed lies in the inability of the stakeholders to appreciate properly the breed.

Conclusion

The Lagunaire breed has the potential to provide solutions for the diversification of livestock production in West Africa. The threats it is facing illustrate the need to implement “appropriate” genetic improvement and conservation programs for the breed to put an end to the genetic erosion. The implementation of this conservation and selection programs require the effective involvement of breeders, breeders’ associations and knowledge of breeding, conservation and selection techniques. There is no sustainable conservation without committed breeders. Yet, this involvement needs to be encouraged by the public authorities by supporting the breeders specialized in the breed.

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