The AGRIHORSENENET COST action attempt

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OUTLINE

• COST Actions
• History
  – The idea of the AGRIHORSENET project
  – Origins
  – Objectives & details
• Analysis of results
• Possible reasons for failure
• Points for discussion
WHAT ARE COST ACTIONS?

From [http://www.cost.eu/COST_Actions](http://www.cost.eu/COST_Actions)

- Promote efficient networking instruments aimed at the cooperation and coordination of nationally funded research activities
- COST support workshops, conferences, training schools, short-term scientific missions and dissemination activities, but no research itself
- Researchers and stakeholders
THE AGRIHORSENETF IDEA

- “Horse network for advancing knowledge on European native horse breeds in agriculture”
- Network of researchers involved in horse studies and linked to breeding associations
- 14 members involved from 12 EU countries
- Application to 2 deadlines:
  - September 2013
  - March 2014
ORIGIN OF THE NETWORK

- **Horse Heritage Foundation (HHF) meeting** held in Geneva in November 2010 coordinated by Betrand Langloise (INRA)
- HHF mission: to preserve horses’ genetic diversity and to disseminate awareness on rare horse breeds
- Meeting’s aim: to organize a scientific committee and a preservation project for coldblooded breeds
MINUTES FORM GENEVA MEETING

• Plan to preserve genetic diversity of coldblooded breeds widespread across Europe:
  – Heavy draught & “Carrossier” breeds
  – Horses and ponies in farm evolving toward leisure

• Phenotypic (conformation, gaits, drawing power and temperament) and genotypic characterization (blood sample -> DNA bank) for 50-60 animals representative of each breed

• Ideas & money required
SHIFT TO A COST ACTION

- First launch in Nantes at EAAP 2013 meeting
- Enlargement of the network to a wider group of researchers experienced with horses not used in sport (i.e., in farms)
- Quick definition of a challenge proposal (10,000 characters) within September 2013
GOAL OF THE AGRIHORSENET

• Sharing information within the network on native horse breeds widespread across Europe building a general inventory of breeds (i.e., preserving traditions, cultural heritage) but also analyze their economic role in the EU farming system

• Use of COST for meetings, workshops, training schools, etc. useful for the aim above
SPECIFIC POINTS OF AGRIHORSENET

Specific sharing information on native horse breeds:

1. Geographical distribution
2. Historical aspect
3. Genetic relationship among breeds
4. Population size and characteristics of selection/conservation plans if existed
5. Traits measured (including temperament/behaviour)
6. Analysis of socio-economic roles in agriculture
7. Specific diseases and welfare issues
8. Communication to a wider audience (including guidelines for selection or conservation purposes)
FIRST APPLICATION RESULTS

• Overall score at first submission 27.86 on 36 (77% of the total score available)

• Some nice comments on the novelty of network and potential applications

• Need to improve mutual scientific benefits, link novelties to further aspects, better description of the dissemination
SECOND APPLICATION RESULTS

- Attempt to improve weaknesses risen by reviewers
- Overall score worse than the previous one

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<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>First Submission</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Rate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Right for COST?</td>
<td>Q.1</td>
<td>5.43</td>
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<td>Public utility?</td>
<td>Q.2</td>
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<td>Innovation?</td>
<td>Q.3</td>
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<td>Impact?</td>
<td>Q.4</td>
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<td>Networking?</td>
<td>Q.5</td>
<td>4.14</td>
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<td>Presentation?</td>
<td>Q.6</td>
<td>4.43</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td><strong>27.85</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.77</strong></td>
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REASONS FOR FAILURE?

- Reduced interaction among participants during the drafting
- Lack of effective research connection among participants and WGs (and mutual benefits too)
- Low impact of defined deliverables in agriculture and food sector
- Dissemination plan lacking of a broad audience
- Too broad project (some aspects perceived no significant for the main objective)
In September 2014 no deadline

EU changed the application process: no more challenge for pre-selection of proposals for further steps but direct application of a full proposal of 15 pages: need for a scientific committee
THE PRESENT COST PROPOSALS

• Fully science and technology-driven
• Need to describe accurately 4 sections
  – S&T excellence (15 pts)
  – Networking excellence (15 pts)
  – Impact (15 pts)
  – Implementation (including GANTT diagram; 5 pts)
Threshold of 34 pts (0.68) for possible funding
• Only a short list of proposals selected (those with very high score)
KNOWN CRITICISMS AROUND HORSES

1. Global horse population compared to cattle amount at 5% (65 vs. 1.300 millions)
2. Horses are low emitters of GHG and less important for food production
3. Horses have very different uses and this can generate confusion
4. Sport horses have a lot of money
5. Link with the industry is weaker than in other species
6. .......
BEING PROPOSITIVE

• Create an effective collaboration team work
• Involve horse industry and a wider group of stakeholders
• Support from external agencies
• New ideas
  – Horses in wider EU projects (Animal health, ecosystem services, etc.)
  – ……..
I asked Santa for a research grant.

You still believe in research grants?