Horizon 2020 Programme

TECH CARE

Integrating innovative TECHnologies along the value Chain to improve small ruminant welfARE management

Press release 2

One busy year on – update on the TechCare project

TechCare is a European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation project (grant no. 802050), involving nine countries – from Scandinavia to the Middle East –aiming to revolutionise the use of precision technologies in sheep and goat farming. Led by Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), TechCare is the biggest study of its kind for small ruminants and is focusing on improving management of welfare using digital technologies.

TechCare is now entering its 2nd year. The first project annual meeting was held on the 19th of October 2021, where the whole 19 partners consortium met, as well as members of the newly appointed TechCare Advisory Board. In total, 54 people joined the meeting held online (due to the Covid19 on-going restrictions). The meeting was an excellent opportunity to reflect on the work and activities that the project has completed in its first year, as well as its upcoming tasks. Over the past year, TechCare has covered a lot of ground. A global list of welfare issues and indicators for sheep and goats in the different production systems and environments that are covered by the project have been developed, as well as an extensive inventory of existing Precision Livestock Farming (PLF) and digital tools, that may or may not be applicable to small ruminant welfare management. Based on this information, two series of national workshops in all 9 partners countries were held. The first ones to get feedback on welfare issues in sheep and goat systems in all the individual partners' countries, and the second ones on the potential PLF and digital tools that could be used to produce early warning systems helping to manage these identified welfare issues. The main common welfare priorities across the sheep and goat sectors were related to health issues such as mastitis, parasites and lameness, as well as environmental factors (e.g. climatic conditions outdoor and comfort indicators indoor), nutritional issues (e.g feed competition) and risks from predators and wild animals. Some of the digital tools with potential to produce early warnings considered at this stage revolved around the use of low-frequency and high-frequency electronic identification technologies, weighing devices, weather/air quality sensors, milk meters and water meters.

The next step of the project includes the implementation of pilot studies on research farms in the UK, France, Norway, Italy and Israel, covering the sheep meat, dairy sheep and dairy goat production systems. The pilots will implement and test a series of PLF and digital tools in different settings, with the aim of providing enough information to set up early warning systems for the identified welfare

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issues. Pilot studies outcomes may be supported by activities carried out under more controlled conditions in experimental farms whereas the most promising solutions will be validated under large scale, commercial farms in the next phases of the project. More national workshops are planned this coming year, notably to get feedback on the type of data and information that stakeholders would like to receive as welfare early warning systems, and to discuss the oncoming results from the pilots.

Stakeholders are central to the project, so if you are interested to join in these discussions, please contact us.

Website: www.techcare-project.eu

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