INTRODUCTION AND WELCOMING ADDRESS

Dr. Tilahun Sahlu, Director

E (Kika) de la Garza Institute for Goat Research, Langston University, Langston, OK USA

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this conference on the Opportunities and Challenges of Enhancing Goat Production in East Africa. The E (Kika) de la Garza Institute for Goat Research is truly pleased and honored to serve as one of the partners, along with Debub University, in organizing this conference.

Ethiopia is home to 17 million goats, which is among the largest populations in Africa. However, the goat industry, more than any other livestock industry, is in its infancy and has not received a great deal of attention from scientists, administrators, or legislators. Ethiopia’s huge livestock population should be looked on as a mixed blessing. These numbers would have been a great asset 25 years ago, but with a population increase from 35 million in 1975 to the current estimate of 70 million inhabitants and a projected population of 90 to 100 million by 2015, Ethiopia’s livestock population could be a liability unless effective management strategies are developed and implemented.

This nation’s farm, pasture and forest lands have never faced such pressure since their origin and, therefore, close attention must be paid and strategic planning is required to avoid a marked imbalance between the environment and the growing human need for expanded crop land for cereal grain production. Direct competition of livestock for crop land must be minimized. This necessitates increasing the use of land areas that have inherently marginal potential for livestock production. In doing so there is the risk of overstocking these lands thereby putting an enormous strain on the available forage base. Additionally, there is a great demand for the wood found on these lands for fuel and construction purposes. The combination of increased livestock numbers and the demand for wood creates the possibility that these lands will be degraded to the point of destruction. Livestock production cannot be viewed as being separate from other agricultural activities that are geared towards food sufficiency. Therefore, effective management from the federal to the local level is needed, inclusive of a strong commitment to environmental conservation through land use planning and other strategies such as sustainable agroforestry systems, that will lead to minimal ecological disruption. These actions are essential in order to secure a bright future for future generations.

In 1998, an institutional partnership was established between Awassa College of Agriculture (ACA), Awassa, Ethiopia and the E (Kika) de la Garza Institute for Goat Research (GIGR) of Langston University (LU), Langston, OK, USA. Funding for the partnership was received from the Association Liaison Office for University Cooperation in Development with funds designated for this purpose by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The Institutional Partnership program was designed to support American institutions of higher learning in forming partnerships with academic institutions in developing countries to address social and development issues, strengthen the capacity of participating institutions in fulfilling their educational missions, contribute to the training of students able to work in an international marketplace and raise the level of awareness and understanding of education and development issues among institution staff. During the past two years, the partnership between LU and ACA has involved a wide variety of activities including training of ACA staff at LU, collaborative research projects at ACA and LU and the establishment of women’s groups for goat production in the region surrounding ACA, a report of which is found in these proceedings. Also during the project period, ACA has been transformed from an agricultural college to a part of Debub University, serving the southern region of Ethiopia. Langston University is looking forward to continued collaboration and exploring ways of expanding activities with the newly formed Debub University.
The original purpose of the workshop was to invite a limited number of faculty from ACA, Alemaya University of Agriculture and other institutes in Ethiopia to exchange ideas on research needs in the area of goat production and give progress reports on development/extension efforts. However, in planning discussions among GIGR and ACA staff and with Dr. Zinash Sileshi, Director of Livestock Research at the Ethiopian Agriculture Research Organization, it was decided that the original purpose was too narrow in scope and that there was an opportunity to have greater impact. In particular, there was a felt need to involve animal industry in the workshop to promote closer ties among industry, research institutes, universities and extension/development organizations to work to improve the quality of livestock and livestock products. By working together, industry, research, academic and extension organizations may be able to improve production conditions, decrease constraints and prevent the formation of defects in animals or their products and improve the quality of both the raw materials and finished products that are used or sold either at home or abroad. We believe that this approach can be a model for future development activities carried out in Ethiopia.

A second, added goal of the workshop is to introduce students to the problems faced by universities, research organizations, industry and extension personnel. It is very important for the leaders of tomorrow to learn the constraints of today and to assist in developing methods of combating them. Thus, a number of students from universities throughout Ethiopia are attending this workshop. In addition to hearing the presentation, these students will have the opportunity to meet and speak with government officials, industry representatives, extension agents, development workers and scientists from Ethiopia and abroad.

Therefore, the purpose of this conference is to bring together producers, university personnel, researchers, industry representatives, extension personnel and development workers in order to discuss problems of the goat industry and to explore opportunities, strategies and new technologies that will enhance production. Most importantly, this diverse group should examine, using a holistic approach, how each species of Ethiopia’s rich livestock population could be utilized to maximal benefit in harmony with the environment.

We have a diverse group of people in the audience at this symposium. That such a group of distinguished scientists, administrators and industry representatives has assembled for a workshop on goat production is an indication of the growing commitment that Ethiopians now give to the country’s livestock production systems. Two of the driving issues that will be touched upon in workshop presentations are the sustainability of agriculture systems and the need for a closer working relationship among producers, researchers and industry. The ultimate goal of all present at this conference is to improve the livelihoods of this nation’s citizens and to meet the challenge of producing not only sufficient food for the growing population, but food of high quality as well.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Association Liaison Office for University Cooperation in Development, through the American Council on Education and the United States Agency for International Development, Washington DC, for funding our project entitled “An Institutional Partnership to Enhance Food Security and Income Generating Potential of Families in Southern Ethiopia Through Improved Goat Production and Extension”. This project was instrumental in bringing together Debub University, formerly Awassa College of Agriculture, Ethiopia and the E (Kika) de la Garza Institute for Goat Research of Langston University, Langston, Oklahoma, USA. We also want to thank the USAID Mission in Addis Ababa, the International Development Partnership between LU and Alemaya University funded through the United Negro College Fund/USAID and the Government of Israel for their financial support of this symposium.

I wish you a very fruitful and rewarding symposium and hope you enjoy the hospitality of Debub University and the people of Awassa.
The Opportunities and Challenges of Enhancing Goat Production in East Africa

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