

## EDITORIAL

### A Plea For Minilivestock

J.E. Cooper

Few who read *Tropicultura* will doubt the importance of minilivestock but there are many others, politicians, administrators and decision makers amongst them, who need to be convinced of the need to explore and to exploit new sources of food and income.

The data speak for themselves. In the next 30 years the human race will have to produce as much food as it has over the past 10,000 years. A recent book (1) points out that the size and yield of irrigated land, cropland, rangeland and pasture will not be able to keep pace with the expected 30% rise in the world's population from 5,290 million in 1990 to 7,030 million in 2010. Even fish stocks are proving inadequate: 26 of the world's major fisheries are either at, or exceeding, their natural limits. The need to look for new resources has never been greater and this message needs to be disseminated widely.

It is not only governments and bureaucrats who can be obstacles to the development of minilivestock. Opposition is encountered at various levels. Even agriculturalists and nutritionists may oppose new enterprises, sometimes due to ignorance, often because they feel ill at ease with minilivestock in contrast to the more conventional species with which they trained or now work: on a day-to-day basis.

These people too need to be told about the exciting challenges and opportunities that minilivestock offer – but in a way that excites them and harnesses their existing knowledge and skills rather than by antagonising them.

It is often at grassroots level that the most careful diplomacy is required in order to convince local people that minilivestock have potential. Each situation has to be addressed in its own way: there are few hard and fast rules. One should be prepared to do a great deal of preparatory work in order to understand local customs and beliefs that may determine the success or failure of the enterprise.

Sometimes even this can prove inadequate, for problems may occur at a later stage. Thus, for example, the BBC World Service (16/6/94) reported that a rabbit-raising scheme in Nepal had failed because local people did not like slaughtering their animals: replacement by Angora rabbits, from which fur can be harvested without the need for killing, has proved to be an acceptable alternative.

Sometimes opposition is for a myriad of reasons. In Tanzania I started a small snail (*Achatina sp.*) breeding unit and endeavoured to interest both colleagues at the University and local people in these (widely distributed and readily available) molluscs as a food source. My ideas were greeted with scepticism on several fronts. Moslems confirmed that they were not, on religious grounds, permitted to eat snails: Christians said that only a small number of ethnic groups in Tanzania traditionally harvested molluscs for food and many considered this habit retrograde: educated colleagues at the University felt that the

production of adequate protein for their country depended upon raising the quality and productivity of existing animals, especially ruminants, and not on squandering limited finances on strange new species. These attitudes began to change when I was asked to advise on a health problem affecting farmed snails in Kenya: the realisation that a neighbouring country was successfully utilising the species, not for local (African) consumption but in order to provide hotels with a luxury item for tourists, swayed a number of Tanzanians into thinking more seriously about this and other exploitable local animals. Even Moslem friends admitted that rearing snails and selling them to someone else might be a good idea and, as a footnote, it is worth recording that my own snails were tended by our young Moslem gardener whose care and attention to detail proved exemplary.

The message is clear. Those of us who recognise the enormous potential of minilivestock have a responsibility to put our case forward with commitment, yes, but also with sensitivity towards the feelings and preconceptions of others.

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