

Epilogue

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For the first time, several hundred people from all over the world met to discuss the topic of working animals. These participants contributed and discussed a broad spectrum of the diverse uses of draft animals. There were impressive pictures of cattle, various equines, reindeer, camels and dogs. These working animals helped with transport, soil cultivation, sowing and harvesting, threshing, haymaking, forestry work and viticulture. The animals were used as pack or draft for fetching water, for municipal refuse collection and also for hobby purposes. Historians and archaeologists provided information on the past, practitioners on the present, and not only the concluding discussion focused on the future of working animals.



Figure 1 – Hay transport using oxen in rural Romania

The exchange brought us a big step forward. Apart from getting to know each other and encouraging each other, the following important realizations for future work emerged from the conference:

1. The use of working animals is very sustainable in relation to working with machines, in more ways than one. They are cultural techniques that meet many of the UN Sustainable Development Goals - both environmental & climate, social and economic.
2. Although working animals play an important role worldwide, they are not valued or even noticed. They are often seen as antiquated. At best there is a romanticized image, at worst the image is of poverty and hardship for both humans and animals. In any case, the above-mentioned advantages are not recognized.
3. People whose prosperity does not depend on working animals, who have chosen to do so voluntarily and frequently as a result of working with machines, almost always cultivate very high regard for the labor and their animals. People who depend on draft or pack animals, and often work in traditional ways, sometimes perceive their work itself as inferior and backward. The lack of appreciation can have a negative impact on animal welfare, too.
4. There is a lack of development of modern equipment and harnesses.

One of the most important tasks is to correct the negative image of working animals worldwide; only when positive images are seen, will draft animal power be given the appreciation it deserves. It is only when there is positive impressions are introduced will the above-mentioned advantages become more evident. In the final session, Timothy Harrigan, therefore, recommended shifting the focus away from the animals and more towards the highly contemporary ecological and social aspects that underpin our work.



Figure 2 – Plowing with a team of draft horses on a research field for animal traction in Lorsch

During the conference, many of these aspects were listed, some of which are reflected in the UN Sustainable Development Goals:

Ecological aspects of using working animals compared to using machines: Biodiversity, species and climate protection, clean energy.

- Draft animals compact the soil less than machines, both in forestry and on arable land and grassland.
- Draft animal handlers tend to manage smaller farms; this creates or maintains smaller landscape structures that also increase biodiversity.
- Many working animals belong to endangered, native livestock breeds - their conservation contributes to biodiversity.
- Unlike tractors, working animals reproduce themselves.
- Almost all working animals are grazers; instead of fossil fuels, they use renewable raw materials as their fuel.
- Fodder plants can be obtained from grazing areas such as steppes, slopes, or marshes, where no food for humans can be grown. Pasture is an effective CO₂ sink, and keeping the land open promotes biodiversity. Alternatively, they utilize green manure or forage, which contributes to more diverse crop rotations and higher soil fertility.
- Draft animals create valuable “fertilizer” (manure). This fertilizer also adds to greater biodiversity because, in addition to our crops, it nourishes soil life and other organisms.

- Unlike mineral fertilizer, manure enriches the soil with organic matter. This builds up humus and stores carbon in the soil, which is good for the climate.
- Because the soil is usually worked more gently, there is less soil erosion and less disturbance of soil life.
- With admittedly higher labor input, working animals create a high added value with relatively little input.

Social aspects of using working animals: Poverty and hunger alleviation, less gender inequality, independence, affordable clean energy, decent work, health.

- In many regions, fetching water is the exclusive task of women and children. Donkeys can support them in this hard work. Therefore, owning a donkey empowers women.
- Fieldwork in the Global South is often done by women using only a hand hoe. Donkeys or even oxen, which do the heavy lifting for them, can make the difference between poverty and modest prosperity.
- With a draft animal, a larger area can be cultivated than by hand. Surpluses can be sold on the market. Increased food security and better health have been repeatedly demonstrated by this larger area cultivation.
- Working animals can be maintained with local resources, unlike machinery. Independence from industrial markets such as fuel, expensive machinery and spare parts also contributes to higher food security.
- Draft animal workers become more familiar with their own soil qualities and topographic issues because they experience every meter (or foot) of their land.
- Draft animal workers become very aware of the tractive force(s) exerted, which raises energy awareness.
- Many people who work with draft animals find the work with the animals physically and psychologically enriching and valuable. Instead of sitting on a noisy tractor emitting pollution, one moves in the fresh air doing a meaningful activity.

But how do we get out of the role of backward exotics?

The topic of working animals may seem rather out of touch for anyone not directly involved in it. Many of us know the phenomenon of "feeling like an alien in the room" (quoting João Rodrigues) when talking about the draft or pack animals - even in ecologically thinking and working groups.

We need a comprehensive outreach strategy to discuss all the elements discussed above.

To outreach to the wider world, we need intensified communication and better exchange among ourselves. This conference was an important step towards reaching this goal.

Through presentations and courses with draft and pack animals, many people can be reached on a regional level. Articles, social media posts, books and other publications on the topic can reach additional interested people. Conferences, fairs and other events can also communicate to politicians and other decision-makers a regional, national and international levels.

We could potentially develop an international certification "logo" or mark for food produced with working animals. Having a logo mark could increase appreciation of sustainably-farmed food products. This logo could combine with Claus Kropp's idea to apply for draft animal work as a UN World Heritage Site.

Last but not least, we need to work on animal welfare and the development of modern equipment. Tillers International in the USA and Prommata in France, which collaborate with small-scale farmers in developing countries to improve food security concerns in their communities, and Paul Schmit (Schaff mat Pærd) in Luxembourg who develops tools for draught animals for small-scale farmers are already doing pioneering work in research, development and training.

When it comes to animal welfare, caring for people, animals and the environment should be considered jointly. Organizations like "The Brooke East Africa" have already recognized a connection between these elements and are helping with veterinary services in a bundle with counseling for humans and animals.

So there is a lot to do!

Our cattle, horses and other working animals have been drivers of progress for thousands of years. Perhaps our draft animals can once again support us in the fulfillment of modern-day progress with their beauty, wisdom and strength.

After this conference, we have a new feeling of solidarity within the working animals' community - and we have growing anticipation for the next conference.

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Figure 1 – V. Dumitrescu.

Figure 2 – Staatl. Schlösser und Gärten Hessen.



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