

POSTER

THE CONSERVATION PROGRAMME FOR BASQUE PIG BREEDS

PROGRAMA DE CONSERVACIÓN DE LAS RAZAS PORCINAS VASCAS

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PALABRAS CLAVE ADICIONALES

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SUMMARY

Pig farming played an important role in the rural Basque economy up until the second half of the 20th century. For the stockbreeders in Euskal Herria (The Basque Country) it has been the main way of establishing a sufficiently healthy domestic economy as well as providing a food source that even nowadays is vindicated as one of the healthiest diets. The autochthonous pig breeds of Euskal Herria have been: Baztanesa, Chato Vitoriano and Euskal Txerria. All three of them come from the Celtic branch but the Baztanesa and Chato Vitoriano are already extinct.

RESUMEN

La producción porcina ha jugado un importante papel en la economía rural vasca hasta la segunda mitad del siglo XX. Para los criadores en Euskal Herria (País Vasco) ésta ha sido la principal manera de conseguir una economía doméstica saludable y de proveerse de una dieta reivindicada hoy como de las más saludables. Las razas autóctonas de Euskal Herria han sido: Baztanesa, Chato Vitoriano y Euskal Txerria. Todos ellos procedentes del Tronco Celta, aunque la Baztanesa y el Chato Vitoriano están extintos.

HISTORIC INTRODUCTION

Pig domestication seems to have started about 9000 years ago, though the oldest known archaeological remains of the domestic pig are those found in Qualat Jarmo (Iraq), which have been dated at 6500 BC by the carbon dating technique, together with those remains found in Anatolia and Mesopotamia. In Euskal Herria, as in other parts of the world, the oldest prehistoric remains correspond to the Neolithic age. The pig is also amongst these findings (in those at Arenaza in San Pedro de Galdames in Bizkaia, and in those at Los Husos in Elvillar in Álava) (Altuna, 1980). At the start of the 20th century pig breeds were divided into two groups: lean pigs and fat pigs. This second group included a breed called Basque, of the Country or Vascongada known in the region of the Encartaciones in Bizkaia as Givos (Oliver, 1941). Its agrotypic is represented by the Celtic branch. From this Basque race three other breeds are derived: the Chato Vitoriano in Álava, the Baztanesa breed in the North of Navarra and the Euskal Txerria in the western Pyrenees.

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CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BASQUE PIG BREEDS

BAZTANESA

This breed originally came from the Baztan valley in the North of Navarra (Spain) from where it spread to the neighbouring areas. It reached a considerable number of animals. The most characteristic morphological details were a robust head, wide forehead and an average length snout, which formed an open angle with the forehead. Their ears were very big, long and floppy and covered the eyes. They had a short neck, arched back, and long wide and straight thorax. Pink coloured skin. They came from the Celtic branch (Echevarría y Echevarría, 1990). They had bristly hair, and the males were selected for hair tufts on the cross and lumbo-sacra region. A very rustic race. There were a lot of animals with a few black patches on their back and at the base of the tail.

CHATO VITORIANO

Known variously as Chato de Vitoria, Chato Alavés, Chato de Llanada, Alaves pig, or pig of the *Model* (referring to the Model Farm in Arkaute in Álava which is where it was selected) (Odriozola, 1946). The breed was found originally in the territory of Álava where it had traditionally been raised but spread all over the North, Castilla y Leon (mainly Burgos), La Rioja, the rest of Euskal Herria and had a big market in Valencia where it was used for breeding. Its best period was between 1950 and 1960 coinciding with the years when this breed was in highest demand amongst pig breeders in the Alavés markets. The highest number

recorded in an official census was in 1955 when 86000 reproductive animals of this breed were registered (Gómez, 2001). The Chato Vitoriano disappeared in the 1960s because of industrial development, change in eating habits, emigration of the population to urban areas and improving economies of the families which also contributed to a change in people's food tastes, preferring lean meat to fat, and finally the introduction of foreign breeds. In a short time this breed was absorbed by others. Today it is extinct.

They were eumetric swine with a tendency towards being subhypertrophic, with a concave or ultra-concave cephalic profile, short snouts and lengthy proportions. The heads were short with straight, wide fleshy foreheads with sparse, fine, white bristle. Short wide snouts. Frontal nasal suture at right angle. Large floppy ears. Short neck. Rounded, long thorax, with slightly drooping rump. Well developed muscles on the back, legs and thighs in comparison with its contemporary breeds. Short strong limbs. The coat was a uniform pinky-white colour with scarcely any bristles or hairs. The height at the withers was 90 cm and the chest depth was 95 cm. The lop ears were very big. The tail was coiled. An adult could weigh up to 300 kg. Very precocious with a high yield of lean meat, highly rustic, and an high fecundity (Oregui, 1956). They were in popular demand for their high quality and the quantity of bacon which served as a fat reserve in the post-war period. Their precocity is their most outstanding physiological feature. They were extremely prolific (9-10 piglets per litter), had a good milk capacity

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and high average daily weight gain (Orive, 1999).

EUSKAL TXERRIA

Known variously as Porc Basque, Basque Pig, Porc Pie Noir du Pais Basque (Black Foot pig from the Basque country), it belongs to the Celtic branch and is related to the extinct Chato Vitoriano and the Baztanesa breeds. There were three varieties of the Euskal Txerria: Basque, Bearnesa and Bigurdana. They all belong to the group of pigs with black piebald coat and are differentiated according to the distribution of the black patches, and the shape of the animals. In the Basque variety the coat was black piebald and only had patches on the head and hindquarters, including the rump, with a patch-free back. With regard to the size, they had shorter limbs and a more compact body. In the Bearnesa variety black on pink was predominant. They had longer limbs and a lengthier body. The Bigurdana variety had black patches on the head, back and hindquarters. They were more robust pigs than the others because they had been crossed with the Craones.

In 1921 the genealogical book for this breed was officially recognised with the name *Black Piebald pig of the Basque Country*. In the 1950s the number of animals started to decrease and in 1981 this breed was practically extinct. In the census of that year there were only 50 animals between both the Basque and Bigurdana breeds. The recuperation of the breed began in the 1980s with the recovery of animals promoted by the ITP (Institut Technique du Porc), the INRA (Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique) and by

the group of stockbreeders of the Aldudes Valley led by the pork butcher Pierre Oteiza who in 1987 discovered the Basque breed in the agricultural fair of Paris and decided to produce high quality hams from free-ranging pigs in the Aldudes forests. He formed a herd of pigs by purchasing sows of different origins. In 1990 he created the stockbreeder association (Texier, 1999). In June of 1997 the genealogical book of the autochthonous pig breeds in danger of extinction *Ligeral* (Livres Genealogiques des races Locales) was created in France. In 1998 two farms were established for this breed, one of which is in Bidegoian (Gipuzkoa) and the other in Zalla (Bizkaia). On the 21st of January of 2002 the Decree 373/2001 of 26th December was published in the Official Gazette of the Basque Country. It was about autochthonous Basque animal breeds and the organisations dedicated to their promotion. This Decree contains the official catalogue of the Basque breeds including the Euskal Txerria breed (Gómez, Orive and Reta, 2001).

The Euskal Txerria breed originated in the eastern part of the Pyrenees extending to the territories of Iparralde and Hegoalde. Its revival occurred in the Valley of Aldudes, in the Lower Navarra. Nowadays it has a stable population in its area of origin and it is gradually increasing in the territories of Navarra, Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia (Gómez, 1996). The breed standard established in 1921 was: Height: 0.75m at the wither; 0.78 m at the rump; Body: 1.40 m length. Long head and straight profile. Mobile snout and narrow forehead (Gómez, 1997). Large ears equal to two thirds of the head

length, close to the base, horizontal and tilted over the eyes. Slightly convex back with a short lumbar region. Large well-developed anterior third. Rounded thorax. Drooping rump. Thin tail with clumps of bristle. Drooping ham and not too evenly-shaped. Strong thick limbs. Black piebald coat with large, well defined patches. Only a few thin bristles with tufts on the shoulder blades and rosettes in the rump.

CONSERVATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF THE BREEDS

BAZTANESA

Until the end of the 1960s most of the pigs in the North of Navarra were of the Celtic type with characteristics of the Baztanesa breed and a few (4.3 percent) of the Chato Vitoriano breed. Its origin seems to be in the Baztan Valley on the farm of the San Francisco Javier Psychiatric Hospital, in the Region of Navarra, where the conservation and improvement of the breed was carried out. In the production of the fattened pig it was usual to get suckling-pigs at weaning, keep them for 8-10 months *making bone* and at the same time as the crop harvest, feed them intensively with potatoes, boiled beetroots and corn and barley flour plus a helping of corn grains. The yield of the pigs fattened like this was very high but the carcasses were fatty and poor in lean meat.

CHATO VITORIANO

The Vitoriano pig, whose weight at slaughtering was over 20 arrobas (1 arroba is the equivalent of 11.5 kg), killed-out at more than 85 percent, with

40 percent bacon and lard, 6 percent ribs and backbone and almost 20 percent hams. The piglets were sold to other provinces, mainly through the then famous (and nowadays non-existent) *Thursday market* of Vitoria. It was a usual practice to fatten some of the animals for family consumption using home grown maize as the main food source during the fattening period.

EUSKAL TXERRIA

It is a rustic breed which is not very prolific (9 piglets per litter) but which has a strong maternal ability and similarly good milk for feeding the litter. It is well adapted to grazing and open air farming. A late developer. In Iparralde there is the *Association des Eleveurs de Porcs Basques* made up of farmers from the Aldudes valley, and there is another in Bidania (Gipuzkoa). Within the project for the recuperation and conservation of the breed a conservation farm was created, located in Aldudes, with a capacity for 30 sows and 30 boars. From the offspring which are obtained, one female and at least one male of each family are kept on the farm, either alive or as frozen gametes. Whenever a farmer needs to change a boar the conservation farm provides him with one. This breed is ideal for feeding in both woods and in fields. The pigs are slaughtered between 12 and 14 months at a weight of between 120 and 150 kg. At this weight, their bacon is not too thick and their meat is in perfect condition for the processing of the products required by the pork butchers, and Basque consumers. *Bidaniko Euskal Txerria* is the other farm which represents this race, and is in the village

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of Bidegoain in Gipuzkoa.

This enterprise began in 1997, and is being undertaken by the young couple Pello Urdapilleta and Maite Izaquirre. With their hard work, tenacity and enthusiasm they are managing to combine the recovery of an autochthonous breed in danger of extinction with the ability to offer the consumer high quality products based on breeding, handling and feeding of the breed with traditional and natural methods. The original idea was Pello's who had an itching to uncover the work of his ancestors. The etymology of his own surname Urdapilleta which means *a load of pigs*, the idyllic countryside of the mountains which surround the country house of Elola and in particular the mountain Ilaun which spreads over 54

hectares which serve as warmth, protection and foods source for the Euskal Txerria, encouraged the development of an exciting recovery. At present they are working with 15 reproductive females, and have in total more than 50 head.

Today, as the European Union recommends the combination of conservation of autochthonous breeds with the supply of high quality products for the urban market, they have found in this Basque village a couple who are trying to show that this is a viable project. Because of this, moreover, they have opened the restaurant Kontzeju which has been a great success. It is in Bidegoain and offers a menu based on products obtained from autochthonous Basque breeds such as the Euskal Txerria.

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