



The socio-economic impact of breeding ranches in Argentina

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Since 1994, 25 vicuna breeding ranches have been established in the Provinces of Salta and Jujuy (Argentina), by the National Institute of Agriculture and Cattle Technology (INTA) at their High Altitude Experimental Station (CEA) with the aims of improving the economic situation of local people while contributing towards vicuna conservation.

Although the conservation and socioeconomic value of corrals has recently been questioned by international forums (eg Traffic, FWS, CITES), ranches are becoming quite popular in all the vicuna holding countries since they allow individual producers, and not just whole communities, to have a stake.

The aim of my research is to investigate the socio-economic impact of vicuna ranches in

Argentina. I am particularly interested in studying whether economic use modifies people's attitudes towards vicuna conservation. I am also participating in the stakeholder analysis at local, national and international level, in collaborative work within the MACS team. Further work is being carried out to identify and assess existing policies which impact on resource management and tenure, with the final aim of encouraging appropriate management approaches that ensure an equitable distribution of benefits from vicuña management.

Vicuña rearing in Argentina

The CEA INTA model consists of individual producers maintaining a variable number of vicunas (12-36) in fully fenced

enclosures of a few hectares. Ranches are not necessarily located in the Puna or in the actual area of vicuña distribution. Vicuñas are given on loan from the CEA INTA herd. Mean herd composition consists of 12 castrated males, 2 reproductive males and 10 females. Producers have 7-12 years to return the same number of vicuña offspring as they received back to the CEA INTA station. In 80% of the cases, fencing material for the installation of corrals are financed by the principal local buyer of vicuña fibre (Pelama Chubut SA). Once vicuña are shorn, producers sell the fibre obtained to Pelama Chubut SA to repay the debt on fencing materials and to get immediate payment. It takes 4-10 years to producers to pay back the loan depending



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on the percentage of their production they allocate to do so. Producers that did not get a loan from Pelama can choose to make crafts (i.e. ponchos) or to sell the fibre to other compa-

Producers pay for vicuna transportation from the INTA station to their ranches, labour for the installation of corrals (approx. 3 months, 5 people), yearly vaccinations, veterinary care, food supplementation and water

vidual ranchers and to be growing in popularity, interviews to 70% of ranch owners revealed contradictory data. To date 37% of breeding ranches have been closed down by the INTA or by the same producers who decided to return the vicunas to the INTA due to lack of water and good pastures, high predation (by pumas or dogs), high vicuna mortality and low fibre production. However, the system is still popular, and 85 producers are in a waiting list to get vicunas.

This research will draw on interviews to the stakeholders involved locally and nationally, data on yearly fibre production, public documents produced by the INTA, grey literature, and a visit to 11 breeding ranches from Salta and Jujuy provinces.

We hope to address questions such as: Why do people want to breed vicunas? Why do people give back their vicunas? Does having a breeding ranch affect people's attitudes towards vicuna conservation? etc

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Box 1: Local stakeholder's main features:**PRODUCERS:**

- ✓ Are given 12-36 vicunas by INTA and fencing materials by Pelama Chubut SA
- ✓ Have 7/12 years to return to INTA the same number of animals plus 10% of offspring
- ✓ Have to sell part of their stock to Pelama Chubut SA to pay back their debt
- ✓ Usually sell rest of the fibre to Pelama on shearing day to get immediate payment

INTA

- ✓ In charge of deciding which ranches can open or should close down
- ✓ Bred 1500 vicunas in captivity from stock of 16
- ✓ Lends vicunas to producers
- ✓ Provides technical assistance
- ✓ Organises and supervises shearing
- ✓ Collects fibre from all ranches
- ✓ Organises national bidding
- ✓ Main fibre producer of Argentina
- ✓ Lobby for captivity at international forums
- ✓ Technical assistance to Chile with regards captive management

Fibre buyer: Pelama Chubut SA

- ✓ Finances fencing materials to producers
- ✓ Provides shearing materials
- ✓ Has won all fibre bidding since 1997
- ✓ Buys all production from CEA INTA
- ✓ Provides financial support to CEA INTA
- ✓ Exports fibre to Italy

Vicuna fibre is auctioned by the INTA. The same company (Pelama Chubut) has been involved in buying vicuna fibre since the first auctions. The price of \$US 250 for fibre and \$US 70 for belly and underparts paid until 2001 was raised \$US 300, and \$US 84,29 in the last bidding (2002) in which many companies participated.

provision (when these are naturally scarce). When producers don't live in the area they hire a tender of livestock to take care of vicunas and keep predators away. Shearing materials are provided by Pelama Chubut SA and technical advice by the INTA.

Although the production of vicuna fiber under captive conditions is said to benefit the indi-



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