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International Year of Camelids

Executive Summary

The Director-General received a request from the Plurinational State of Bolivia for the establishment of the “International Year of Camelids” for discussion at the 25th Session of the Committee on Agriculture (September 2016).

Camelids are the main means of subsistence for millions of families who live in the most hostile environments in about 90 countries of the planet. Those animals are essential for food security and nutrition as they are the main source of protein for indigenous communities in different regions of the world. They also provide fibre, organic fertilizer, traction and transport, and are indispensable for nomadic pastoral livelihoods. Recognizing the importance of Camelids for food security, poverty reduction and livelihoods, especially in arid lands, the Committee on Agriculture supported the principle of establishing an International Year of Camelids¹. The 155th Session of the Council recognized the importance of camelids for food security and supported the principle of establishing an International Year of Camelids, while noting that further information was required and the proposal would be provided to the 156th Session of Council in April 2017 for consideration².

This document summarizes the opportunities and benefits that could be generated by declaring an International Year of Camelids for contributing towards the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and FAO Strategic Objectives. A draft resolution is also submitted in Annex to this document for consideration by the Council.

Suggested action by the Council

The Council is invited to:

- a) examine the proposal to establish an International Year of Camelids and provide guidance as to an appropriate year, noting that the year 2024 could be selected in line with past practice and the FAO policy on the proclamation and celebration of international years;
- b) make a recommendation to the 40th Session of the Conference for decision.

¹ COAG/2016/17 and C 2017/21 refer

² CL 155/REP



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I. Background

1. Efforts already made by FAO to fulfil the Millennium Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been clearly expressed in the successful experiences of International Years celebrated in the last decade. In particular, FAO mandates linked to International Years have contributed to the dissemination of best practices, which has been catalytic for specific actions promoting food security and nutrition to eradicate hunger.
2. Camelids contribute substantially to reducing extreme poverty (SDG 1) and ending hunger (SDG 2) in regions where they are kept. The products and services provided by camelids (meat, milk, fibre, and traction/transport) also help ensure food security and nutrition and improve the livelihoods of the communities that keep these animals. Camelid keeping is also associated with the empowerment of women (SDG 5) involved in the processing and marketing of camelid fibre and in pastoral work.
3. Camelids play a key role in the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems (SDG 15) and, therefore, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and stem the loss of biological diversity.

II. Overview

4. Camelids are the main means of subsistence for millions of families who live in the most hostile environments in about 90 countries of the planet, and where most other livestock species would be unable to survive. Well adapted to these environments and to face climate change variability, they provide essential ecosystem services.
5. Camelids are a main source of protein throughout South America's extensive Andean highlands as well as in the majority of deserts in Africa and Asia; meat and milk from these animals guarantee daily food for millions of people. Camelids also provide fibre for clothes for indigenous communities and organic fertilizer that guarantees subsistence agricultural production, and serve as traction and transport means for products and people.
6. Camelid species, camels (wild and domestic) and dromedaries, are crucial for nomadic pastoral life, governed by transhumance in search of pastures, as they are used as beasts of burden. They are called “ships of the desert” because of their capacity to travel vast distances and going for long periods without water.
7. The four South American camelids species (llama, alpaca, vicuña and guanaco) are considered unique species of indigenous mammals from the continent. They symbolize an important element in the cultural identity of ancestral indigenous communities.

III. Objective of the Proposal

8. The aim of an International Year is to educate the public and governments on the importance of recognizing and valuing the economic and social importance of camelids in the lives of communities that are highly susceptible and vulnerable to extreme poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition.
9. Better care of camelids and enhancement of their production would help to reduce levels of extreme poverty, given that optimizing their multiple produces (meat, milk, fibre, and traction/transport) would help increase income and resources as well as guaranteeing sustainable livelihoods and reducing hunger and malnutrition in areas with extreme weather conditions.

IV. Activities

10. The lessons learned from activities implemented in previous International Years will help in the preparation of an action agenda and activities to be developed at local, national, regional and global levels, as well as in the compilation of a calendar of activities.

V. Selection of an Appropriate Year

Under the FAO Policy on Proclamation and Implementation of International Years (C 2013/LIM/15) “In general, there should be an interval of at least two years between two International Years”, however, Member Nations have approved exceptions to this policy in past years. Noting that the Council at its 155th Session last December endorsed a draft Conference Resolution requesting that the year 2020 be declared the International Year of Plant Health, and a second draft Conference Resolution supporting the declaration of 2022 as the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture, it is proposed that 2024 be selected to be declared the International Year of Camelids.

International Year of Camelids

Draft Resolution

The Conference,

Noting that camelids constitute the main means of subsistence for millions of poor families who live in the most hostile ecosystems on the planet, and contribute to the fight against hunger (SDG 2), the reduction of extreme poverty (SDG 1), the empowerment of women (SDG 5), and the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems (SDG 15).

Recognizing that Camelids are a main source of protein, fibre for clothes and fertilizer for agricultural production for indigenous communities throughout South America's extensive Andean highlands as well as in the majority of deserts in Africa and Asia.

Recognizing that camelids are a unique species of indigenous mammals in South America, symbolizing an important element in the cultural identity of ancestral pastoral indigenous communities.

Affirming that camelids can play a key role in addressing the effects of climate change, particularly in arid and semi-arid lands and that recognition, advocacy and support for the promotion of the products and services provided by them is of paramount importance for the livelihoods of the communities depending on them;

Recalling the urgent need to raise public awareness of the importance of camelids for food security and ecosystem functions, and to promote actions that improve the management of camelids in order to contribute to the agreed United Nations Sustainable Development Goals;

Trusting that such a celebration would establish a platform and encourage actions to promote and implement activities in favour of the conservation, sustainable use and development of camelid genetic resources, as well as raise awareness of their importance in addressing issues of global concern, including hunger, poverty and threats to the environment;

Stressing that additional costs of activities arising from the implementation of the International Year of Camelids be met through voluntary contributions, including from the private sector.

Requests the Director-General to transmit this Resolution to the Secretary-General of the United Nations with a view to having the General Assembly of the United Nations consider at its next session declaring the Year 2024 as the International Year of Camelids.