



For the preservation and promotion of animal genetic resources, the Federal Office for Agriculture FOAG has financially supported the project „**Ram Center – promotion of genetic diversity and quality of the four endangered Swiss native ovine breeds**“ for 2009 – 2011.

### **Ram Center for four endangered Swiss native ovine breeds**

According to FAO guidelines, four of the last remaining eight Swiss native ovine breeds are endangered; without the help of conservation projects, the Valais Red, the Bündner Oberländer sheep, the mirror sheep and the Engadine sheep would have disappeared by now. A basic problem with rearing sheep is that young rams cannot be kept with the herd because once they reach sexual maturity they would cover every ewe in sight. The males therefore have to be kept in a separate herd, which is not always possible, especially for small-scale breeders, through lack of infrastructure. As a result, young rams are mostly selected at an earlier age for slaughter and only a small number reach an age where an optimum selection is made for breeding. This means that many potentially valuable rams are never available to breeders, which is not helpful for promoting breeding and ensuring the preservation of the gene pool of the various breeds.

### **The project**

In that sense Ram Center can help. This project is co-financed by the Federal Office for Agriculture FOAG; since 2009 rams of the four endangered breeds have been raised on two farms and kept in mixed-breed male herds. The animals remain the property of the breeders but are transferred to the ram center where their services can be provided to committed breeders. Rare lines of rams are bred at the center ewes are covered and rams are bought or lent out. In this way it is possible to improve the gene pool of breeding animals.

### **Benefit and success**

The project has got off to a good start: in 2010 a total of 100 rams from all four endangered breeds were sent to the ram center and, as a consequence, used for breeding. The enthusiastic exchange of information between breeders at the ram center is also helping towards the conservation of rare breeds of sheep. At the same time, the ram center have become a forum for sheep breeders where know-how on practical matters is made freely available. Another result of the project has been an annual training course, first held in 2010, for people who keep sheep and those going into breeding for the first time. Among other things, participants learn about the mechanism of conservation breeding. People who live near the ram center also take pleasure in the noticeably colourful, mixed-breed herds they observe in the fields when out for a walk, which means that these rare breeds of sheep are also becoming more familiar and more popular among the non-farming sector of the population. The new ram centre project is thriving and is well on the road to success.

**Contact person:** Erwin Kump, ProSpecieRara, Tel. +41 (0)62 832 08 78