Livestock Veterinarian Helps Improve European Meat Production

Catalina Cabrera, from the veterinary hospital’s Livestock Herd Health and Reproduction Service, traveled to the Republic of Georgia twice in the past few years to help improve beef and pork production conditions in the former Soviet region. Through a USAID-supported Farmer-to-Farmer Program, Cabrera conducted training in embryo transfer and artificial insemination in an effort to increase the meat quality of livestock.

In this still-developing section of Eastern Europe, beef and pork producers are unable to meet the demands of customers due to low production results of the breeds indigenous to the area. Previous attempts to improve conditions involved importation of live animals with better genetics, but those plans failed as the animals could not adhere to the Georgian feed conditions and mountainous terrains. Cabrera’s efforts sought to improve the genetics of the livestock so that future generations of animals born in the region—that would instinctively adapt to their conditions—would produce better quality and quantities of meat.

To improve pork production, Cabrera chose to artificially inseminate Georgian pigs with boar semen from several different breeds known for their production prowess. The first generation of the genetically improved piglets was born in the fall of 2013, and they were also artificially inseminated on Cabrera’s follow-up visit the next year. In just a few generations of insemination, the once low quality Georgian pigs have evolved into a high quality swine breed.

Genetic improvement was more easily accomplished in cattle. Instead of artificial insemination, the cows were implanted with embryos from American Hereford cows to immediately produce 100 percent Hereford calves—the first Herefords born in the Republic of Georgia. The new breed—that will provide better weight gain, beef quality and therefore, production—is a vast improvement over the previous cattle that failed to produce high quantities of meat due to it being an old cross-breed not specialized or separated into meat and milk production.

Taking into consideration the cultural resistance in the region related to new technologies, Farmer-to-Farmer Program coordinators spoke highly of Cabrera’s performance, drawing attention to her knowledge and professionalism that quickly instilled trust and respect from the 30 participants who received training. Thanks to Cabrera’s teachings, the Georgian veterinarians and farmers now have the knowledge and connections to continue improving their meat production.