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Raising the local cattle breed Mirandesa in Trás-os-Montes mountain areas: traditional versus new production management systems

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The cattle breed Mirandesa has its origin from the region of Trás-os-Montes more specifically, in the Cold Mountain lands and in the Mirandês Plateau. These two geographical areas have conditioned two agricultural systems which integrate the Mirandesa breed bovines, mainly due to weather conditions. The first is characterised by heavier rainfall (over 800/1000 mm), where permanent irrigated pastures predominate. In the Mirandês Plateau, where the rainfall is lower (under 600/800mm), non-irrigated meadows are more frequent. In previous studies two cattle management systems in these mountain areas were identified. One, the traditional, is associated mainly to older farmers, with small herds, on which the cows feed mainly on natural pastures. Cows are conducted daily to the pastures and spend the night in traditional cowsheds located around the farmers' houses. Calves remain all day in the calf sheds until weaning. The other management system of the Mirandesa cows is extensive management. This is used by younger farmers who raise bovine herds of greater size and chose to use extensive management, maintaining the animals always on the field. In any of the mentioned management systems the objective of the farmers is the sale of calves at weaning, at the approximate age of 7 months, when the meat can be marketed as PDO (Protected Designation of Origin). The animal feeding comprises natural pastures which are complemented with various forage crops. This communication intends to highlight and discuss the major constraints of these two systems from a technical, social and economic point of view. Will also be shown the solutions found in order to overcome these constraints that have permitted the maintenance of this production clearly typical of these mountain areas.