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IN LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION

PROCEEDINGS



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INSTITUTE FOR ANIMAL HUSBANDRY
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CONTENTS

INVITED PAPERS

<i>M. Lukić, Z. Pavlovski, Z. Škrbić, K. Umetsu, V. Petričević</i> THE PRESENT AND FUTURE LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION – CASE STUDY SERBIA (Serbia).....	1-14
<i>V. Jukna, Č. Jukna, E. Meškinytė-Kaušilienė</i> GENETIC DIVERSITY OF BREED OF BEEF CATTLE POPULATION CONCERNING MEAT PRODUCTION AND QUALITY(Lithuania).....	15-25
<i>V. Pantelić, D. Ružić-Muslić, M.M. Petrović, D. Nikšić, D. Ostojić- Andrić, S. Aleksić, M. Lazarević</i> THE PHENOTYPIC VARIABILITY OF PRODUCTION TRAITS IN THE POPULATION OF SIMMENTAL COWS (Serbia).....	26-36
<i>P. Mijić</i> MICROCLIMATE PARAMETERS ON THE CATTLE FARMS AND SOME TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS FOR ELIMINATION OF THEIR HARMFUL INFLUENCE (Croatia).....	37-47
<i>M.D. Petrović, M.M. Petrović, V. Bogdanović, S. Bogosavljević- Bošković, R. Đedović, S. Rakonjac</i> EFFECT OF FIXED AND CONTINUOUS NON-GENETIC FACTORS ON LENGTH OF SERVICE PERIOD IN SIMMENTAL COWS (Serbia).....	48-56
<i>Z. Ilić, R. Djoković, V. Kurćubić, M.P. Petrović, V. Caro-Petrović, J. Stojković, B. Milošević, Z. Spasić, S. Ćirić, B. Ristanović</i> EVALUATION THE METABOLIC STATUS OF EARLY AND MID LACTATION DAIRY COWS THROUGH CHANGES IN BLOOD BIOCHEMICAL INDICATORS (Serbia).....	57-65
<i>D. Ostojić-Andrić, S. Hristov, M.M. Petrović, V. Pantelić, S. Aleksić, D. Nikšić, M. Dokmanović</i> WELFARE INDICATORS OF DAIRY COWS - SELECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION IN ASSESSMENT (Serbia).....	66-79

<i>S. Hristov, B. Stanković, N. Maksimović D. Ostojić-Andrić, Z. Zlatanović,</i> THE DAIRY FARM RISK ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF BIOSECURITY PLAN (Serbia).....	80-91
<i>I. Bahelka, M. Gondeková</i> A SURVEY OF BEEF CARCASS AND QUALITY TRAITS IN SLOVAKIA (Slovakia).....	92-101
<i>W. Migdał, B. Živković, J. Tkaczewska, P. Kulawik, A. Migdał, Ł. Migdał</i> CULINARY VALUES OF BEEF MEAT (Poland).....	102-112
<i>M. Iwasaki, M. Lukic, T. Yamashiro, M. Gogic, C. Radovic, F.J. Andriamanohiarisoamanana, K. Umetsu</i> EFFECT OF METHANE FERMENTATION ON SURVIVAL OF ANTIBIOTICS-RESISTANT BACTERIA IN DAIRY COW MANURE (Japan).....	113-118
<i>B. Vidić, S. Savić, S. Boboš, V. Vidić, N. Prica</i> NEOSPORA CANINUM IN CATTLE: EPIZOOTIOLOGY, DIAGNOSTICS AND CONTROL MEASURES (Serbia).....	119-128
<i>Z. Luković, D. Radojković</i> DISPERSION PARAMETERS FOR LITTER SIZE IN PIGS (Croatia)	129-139
<i>M. Wähner, J. Kauffold</i> EFFECTS OF FEEDING ON REPRODUCTION IN PIGS (Germany).	140-154
<i>Liu Di</i> CHARACTERISTICS, STUDIES AND UTILIZATIONS OF CHINESE LOCAL SWINES (China).....	155-162
<i>Č. Radović, M. Petrović, B. Živković, D. Radojković, N. Parunović, R. Savić, M. Gogić</i> PORK PRODUCTION AND EVALUATION OF MEAT YIELD IN SERBIA AND THE WORLD (Serbia).....	163-173
<i>G. Cilev</i> EXAMINING THE EFFICIENCY OF THE PARTIAL SUBSTITUTION OF THE MAIZE WITH A BY-PRODUCTS OBTAINED BY MANUFACTURING VEGETABLES AND FRUITS IN MIXTURES FOR WEANED PIGLETS (Macedonia).....	174-187

<i>D. Živković, S. Stajić, N. Stanišić</i> POSSIBILITIES FOR THE PRODUCTION OF MEAT AND MEAT PRODUCTS WITH IMPROVED NUTRITIONAL AND FUNCTIONAL VALUE (Serbia).....	188-199
<i>N. Stanišić, D. Živković, M. Petrović, N. Delić, G. Marinkov, Lj. Stojanović</i> CONJUGATED LINOLEIC ACID IN PIG NUTRITION: EFFECTS ON FATTENING PERFORMANCE AND CARCASS COMPOSITION (Serbia).....	200-211
<i>G. Biagi, C. Pinna</i> THE UTILIZATION OF PROBIOTIC BACTERIAL STRAINS FOR MONOGASTRIC ANIMALS WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION (Italy)	212-221
<i>Z. Škrbić, Z. Pavlovski, M. Lukić, V. Petričević, D. Milić, G. Marinkov, Lj. Stojanović</i> THE ROLE OF LIGHT IN BROILER PRODUCTION (Serbia).....	222-231
<i>D. Žikić, G. Ušćebrka, S. Stojanović, Z. Kanački</i> ALTERNATIVE GROWTH PROMOTERS AND BROILER'S INTESTINAL MORPHOLOGY AND FUNCTION (Serbia).....	232-243
<i>D. Šefer, S. Radulović, R. Marković, D. Jakić-Dimić, D. Milić</i> BIOTECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS FOR THE GROWTH STIMULATION OF BROILERS (Serbia).....	244-260
<i>S. Lilić, S. Dimitrijević, T. Ilić</i> IMPORTANCE OF COCCIDIOSIS IN POULTRY PRODUCTION (Serbia).....	261-278
<i>M. Kenawi, M.P. Petrovic, V. Caro-Petrović</i> EFFECT OF EDIBLE COATING AND STORAGE TEMPERATURE ON THE QUALITY OF TABLE EGGS (Egypt).....	279-287
<i>D. Abadjieva, M. Chervenkov, K. Shumkov, A. Shimkus, A. Shimkiene, E. Kistanova</i> IMPROVING OF PRODUCTIVE AND REPRODUCTIVE PERFORMANCES IN RABBITS BY BIOLOGICALLY ACTIVE FEED ADDITIVES (Bulgaria).....	288-298

<i>M. Savić, S. Aleksić, D. Živković</i> BREEDS OF CHOICE IN ORGANIC PRODUCTION SYSTEM (Serbia).....	299-306
<i>A.I. Erokhin, E.A. Karasev, I.N. Sycheva</i> STATE AND PERSPECTIVES OF SHEEP BREEDING DEVELOPMENT IN RUSSIA (Russia).....	307-313
<i>Ch. Ligda, E. Sossidou, I. Tzouramani</i> DOMESTIC PROJECT: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PASTORAL AND RANGELAND SHEEP AND GOAT PRODUCTION SYSTEMS IN EPIRUS (IPEIROS) REGION IN GREECE (Greece).....	314-324
<i>B. Marković, Z. Antunović, J. Novoselec, M. Marković, Ž. Klir</i> COMPARISON OF THE EXTERIOR CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ENDANGERED SHEEP BREEDS IN MONTENEGRO AND REPUBLIC OF CROATIA (Montenegro).....	325-332
<i>D. Ružić-Muslić, M.P. Petrović, M.M. Petrović, Z. Bijelić, V. Caro- Petrović, V. Pantelić, P. Perišić</i> OPTIMIZATION OF ENERGY AND PROTEIN LEVEL IN DIETS FOR FATTENING LAMBS (Serbia).....	333-347
<i>P. Polák, J. Tomka, M. Margetin, D. Apolen, M. Gondeková, A. Oravcová, Z. Krupová</i> FATTENING ABILITY, CARCASS AND MEAT QUALITY AND RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ULTRASOUND MEASUREMENTS AND CARCASS QUALITY IN HEAVY LAMBS (Slovakia).....	348-356
<i>M. Kastelic, D. van Liere, A. Premik-Banič, N. Siard</i> THE ATTITUDE OF SLOVENIAN FARMERS TOWARDS WOLVES (Slovenia).....	357-363
<i>D. Sokolović, B. Dinić, G. Jevtić</i> FORAGE QUALITY, PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION ON PERENNIAL GRASSES (Serbia).....	364-381
<i>A. Simić, Z. Tomić, S. Vučković, Z. Bijelić, V. Mandić</i> MEADOW MIXTURES IN SERBIA: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES (Serbia).....	382-398
<i>Z. Bijelić, Z. Tomić, D. Ružić-Muslić, V. Mandić, A. Simić, G. Marinkov, Lj. Stojanović</i> GRASS-LEGUME SILAGES (Serbia).....	399-415

<i>V. Mandić, A. Simić, Z. Tomić, V. Krnjaja, Z. Bijelić, G. Marinkov, Lj. Stojanović</i> EFFECT OF DROUGHT AND FOLIAR FERTILIZATION ON MAIZE PRODUCTION (Serbia).....	416-429
--	---------

ORALLY PRESENTED PAPERS

<i>K. Fischer, U. Wuestemann, H. Schlegel, M. Waehner</i> COMPARISON OF AD LIBITUM AND RESTRICTIVE FEEDING OF FATTENING PIGS (Germany).....	430-436
---	---------

<i>H.A.W. Lengkey, F.R. Wolayan, M. Najoan, P. Edianingsih, B. Bagau</i> THE EFFECT OF FERMENTED MIXED COCONUT OIL AND TOFU SOLID WASTE SUPPLEMENT ON MEAT TENDERNESS AND CHOLESTEROL OF BROILER (Indonesia).....	437-445
--	---------

<i>N. Puvača, V.S. Stanačev, D. Milić, V.Ž. Stanačev, Z. Pavlovski, Z. Škrbić</i> EFFECT OF EXTRUSION AND MICROWAVE ROASTING ON CHEMICAL COMPOSITION AND PROTEIN SOLUBILITY OF FLAXSEED INTENDED FOR BROILERS NUTRITON (Serbia)...	446-452
---	---------

POSTER SECTION I

<i>B. Stojanović, G. Grubić, N. Đorđević, A. Božičković, V. Davidović, A. Ivetić</i> EFFECTS OF DIET PHYSICALLY EFFECTIVE FIBER CONTENT ON FEEDING EFFICIENCY AND MILK PRODUCTION AT DAIRY COWS (Serbia).....	453-460
--	---------

<i>D. Kučević, S. Trivunović, M. Plavšić, M. Radinović, V. Bogdanović</i> CHARACTERISTICS OF FEEDING BEHAVIOUR OF DAIRY COWS DURING EARLY LACTATION (Serbia).....	461-467
---	---------

<i>K. Krastev, S. Grigorova</i> SEASON'S INFLUENCE OF SOME ECOLOGICAL FACTORS ON MILK PRODUCTIVITY IN COWS (Bulgaria).....	468-476
--	---------

<i>M. Vićentijević, R. Mitrović, V. Vuković</i> SAFETY OF GOLJIJA MILK AND CHEESE WITH RADIATION- HYGIENIC ASPECTS (Serbia).....	477-488
--	---------

<i>D. Stanojević, R. Đedović, V. Bogdanović, R. Beskorovajni, P. Perišić, M. Popovac, N. Popović</i> HERITABILITY AND REPEATABILITY ESTIMATION OF MILK YIELD TRAITS OF BLACK AND WHITE COWS (Serbia).....	489-496
<i>B. Pisinov, A. Kasalica, V. Vuković</i> QUALITY CONTROL OF MILK AND MILK PRODUCTS BASED ON PHYSICOCHEMICAL PROPERTIES (Serbia).....	497-503
<i>L.K. Kozelov, M.R. Yossifov</i> BIOFUEL INDUSTRY' BYPRODUCTS – ALTERNATIVE OF TRADITIONAL PLANT PROTEIN SOURCES IN RUMINANT' DIETS (Bulgaria).....	504-520
<i>M. Petričević, S. Aleksić, M.M. Petrović, N. Stanišić, M. Gogić, D. Nikšić, V. Petričević</i> SLAUGHTER TRAITS, CARCASS COMPOSITION AND MEAT QUALITY OF CATTLE SLAUGHTERED AT DIFFERENT BODY WEIGHTS (Serbia).....	521-527
<i>M.M. Petrović, S. Aleksić, D. Ostojić-Andrić, M.P. Petrović, V. Pantelić, N. Stanišić, M. Petričević</i> THE EFFECT OF CROSSING SIMMENTAL CATTLE WITH FRENCH BEEF CATTLE BREEDS ON SLAUGHTER PROPERTIES AND QUALITY OF MEAT (Serbia).....	528-535
<i>D. Nikšić, M.M. Petrović, V. Pantelić, D. Ostojić-Andrić, V. Caro-Petrović, P. Perišić, M.D. Petrović</i> VARIABILITY OF MILK TRAITS IN THE POPULATION OF SIMMENTAL CATTLE IN SERBIA (Serbia).....	536-542
<i>M. Lazarević, M.M. Petrović, V. Pantelić, D. Ružić-Muslić, V. Bogdanović, R. Đedović, M.D. Petrović</i> STUDY OF THE VARIABILITY OF MILK TRAITS IN THE POPULATION OF HOLSTEIN FRIESIAN CATTLE IN CENTRAL SERBIA (Serbia).....	543-549
<i>S. Aleksić, M.M. Petrović, V. Pantelić, D. Ostojić-Andrić, N. Stanišić, M. Petričević, D. Nikšić</i> EATING QUALITY OF BEEF MEAT (Serbia).....	550-557

<i>V. Vuković, J. Kečkeš, M. Vićentijević, G. Luković</i> EXAMINATION OF SULFAMETHOXAZOLE AS ONE OF THE INITIAL SUBSTANCES IN FINISHED MEDICINAL PRODUCT AD US.VET. (Serbia).....	558-563
<i>S. Ćirić, Z. Ilić, B. Milošević, J. Stojković, Z. Spasić, N. Stolić, B. Ristanović</i> PRESENCE AND SOURCES OF FAECAL CONTAMINATION OF DRINKING WATER SOURCE (Serbia).....	564-571
<i>T.P. Popova, M.D. Kaleva, B.D. Baykov, B.S. Zaharinov, S.M. Marinova-Garvanska</i> MICROBIOLOGICAL AND EPIZOOTOLOGICAL CHARACTERIZATION OF MATERIALS FROM WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT (Bulgaria).....	572-579
<i>B. Zaharinov, Z. Shindarska, S. Garvanska, V. Kirov, B. Baykov</i> AGROECOLOGIC VALUATION OF ORGANIC WASTE IN DIFFERENT TECHNOLOGIES OF STORAGE (Bulgaria).....	580-589
<i>M. Stupar, V. Vidović, D. Lukač</i> BARRIERS IN TRANSGENES APPLICATION IN CONTEMPORARY LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION (Serbia).....	590-601
<i>S. Savić, B. Vidić, Ž. Grgić, A. Potkonjak, D. Sakač</i> EMERGING VECTOR BORNE DISEASES – RISK FOR PUBLIC HEALTH (Serbia).....	602-608
<i>I. Stojanov, J. Petrović, M. Kapetanov, M. Živkov-Baloš, J. Prodanov-Radulović</i> THE FINDINGS OF SOME BEE PATHOGENS AND CCD SYNDROME (Serbia).....	609-617
<i>R. Balkanska, M. Ignatova</i> PHYSICOCHEMICAL PARAMETERS OF BULGARIAN RAPE HONEY (<i>Brassica</i> spp.) AND CORIANDER HONEY (<i>Coriandrum sativum</i> L.) (Bulgaria).....	618-626
<i>T. Petrović, D. Vidanović, I. Stojanov, D. Lupulović, G. Lazić, N. Plavša, S. Lazić</i> FIRST MOLECULAR DETECTION OF SIX HONEYBEE VIRUSES IN SERBIAN APIARIES (Serbia).....	627-639

<i>G. Nakev, P. Stamberov, I. Dimitrova, N. Stancheva, S. Georgieva, D. Hristova, G. Angelov, T. Mehmedov, K. Genova, A. Teneva</i> GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF SKELETAL MUSCLE IN CONNECTION WITH THE EXPRESSION OF THE MYOSTATIN GENE (MSTN)* (Bulgaria).....	640-647
--	---------

POSTER SECTION II

<i>M. Dokmanović, M.Z. Baltić, N. Karabasil, N. Glamoclija, S. Pantić, R. Marković, M. Todorović</i> FACTORS OF IMPORTANCE FOR SUCCESSFUL ELECTRICAL STUNNING OF PIGS (Serbia).....	648-654
--	---------

<i>K.P. Brüssow, I. Egerszegi, J. Rátky</i> RESULTS OF REPRODUCTIVE RESEARCH IN FEMALE MANGALICA PIGS (Germany).....	655-663
---	---------

<i>J. Kureljušić, N. Jezdimirović, V. Vuković, D. Jakić-Dimić, S. Vesković-Moračanin, M. Jezdimirović</i> THE ISOLATION OF LISTERIA MONOCYTOGENES FROM RBACON (Serbia).....	664-669
--	---------

<i>V. Vidović, A. Stoisavljević, D. Lukač, Lj. Štrbac, M. Stupar</i> CARCASS QUALITY AND MEAT OF FATTENING PIGS SIRES LANDRACE AND YORKSHIRE (Serbia).....	670-681
---	---------

<i>N. Metodiev, S. Gochev, M. Ignatova</i> STUDY ON FECUNDITY OF HYBRID SOWS (Bulgaria).....	682-689
---	---------

<i>M. Todorova, M. Ignatova</i> EFFECT OF FEEDING RAPESEED MEAL TO WEANED PIGS ON PERFORMANCE AND TOTAL SERUM CHOLESTEROL CONCENTRATIONS (Bulgaria).....	690-696
---	---------

<i>D. Andronikov, D. Naseva, N. Taskov, D. Saneva, A. Kuzelov</i> CHEMICAL AND MICROBIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF FRESH, FROZEN AND EMULSIONS OF PORK SKINS (Macedonia).....	697-704
--	---------

<i>A. Kuzelov, D. Naseva, N. Taskov, D. Saneva, D. Spasova, D. Andronkov</i> IMPACT OF FUNCTIONAL MIX AND STARTER CULTURES ON THE SENSORY PROPERTIES OF PERMANENT SAUSAGES PRODUCED IN INDUSTRIAL CONDITIONS (Macedonia).....	705-712
--	---------

<i>J. Bojkovski, T. Vasiljević, A. Vasić, N. Zdravković, D. Stojanović, D. Rogožarski</i> ANIMAL HEALTH CONTROL OF PIGS ON COMERCIAL FARMS (Serbia).....	713-722
<i>J. Kecman, M. Waehner</i> WHICH AMOUNT OF TOTAL ENERGY REQUIREMENT OF SUCKLING PIGLETS CAN COVERED BY MILK OF SOWS? (Germany).....	723-730
<i>H. Schlegel, K. Fischer, M. Waehner</i> CLUSTER ANALYSIS – A STATISTICAL TOOL TO ANALYSE THE COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP WITHIN DIFFERENT PARAMETERS IN PIGS (Germany).....	731-739
<i>B. Živković, W. Migdal, G. Cilev, Č. Radović, M. Gogić, G. Marinkov, Lj. Stojanović</i> THE EFFECTS OF RELATIONSHIP OF METABOLISABLE ENERGY, LYSINE AND THREONINE IN THE DIETS OF THE FIRST TWO THIRDS ON GESTATION OF SOWS (Serbia).....	740-750
<i>M. Gogić, M. Petrović, B. Živković, Č. Radović, D. Radojković, N. Stanišić, D. Stanojević</i> THE EFFECT OF GENOTYPE, YEAR, AND FARM ON THE VARIABILITY OF TRAITS IN THE PERFORMANCE TEST OF GILTS (Serbia).....	751-760
<i>A. Softić, A. Kavazović, V. Katica, V. Šakić, A. Katica, N. Mlaćo, M. Varatanović</i> INFLUENCE OF STOCKING DENSITY ON CARCASS QUALITY OF BROILERS (Bosnia and Herzegovina).....	761-768
<i>D. Okanović, R. Čolović, D. Milić, N. Vukelić, V. Zekić, T. Tasić, P. Ikonić</i> THE IMPACT OF PHYTOGENIC ADDITIVES ADDED INTO DIET ON ECONOMIC RESULTS OF BROILERS PRODUCTION (Serbia)	769-775
<i>M. Živkov-Baloš, Ž. Mihaljev, S. Jakšić, Ž. Čupić, M. Kapetanov</i> CONCENTRATION OF ARSENIC IN WATER AND TISSUES OF BROILERS (Serbia).....	776-783
<i>J. Petrović, V. Dorđević, I. Stojanov, D. Milanov, S. Stefanović</i> DETECTION OF FLUOROQUINOLONE RESIDUES BY MICROBIOLOGICAL SCREENING METHOD – FLUMEQUINE (Serbia).....	784-793

<i>M. Kapetanov, D. Potkonjak, M. Živkov-Baloš, I. Stojanov, D. Milanov, Ž. Mihaljev</i> PREDISPOSING FACTORS OF CLOSTRIDIOSIS IN COMMERCIAL POULTRY FLOCKS (Serbia).....	794-803
<i>D. Potkonjak, M. Velhner, E. Nikolić-Dorić, M. Kapetanov, D. Orlić, A. Potkonjak, B. Lako</i> UNEXPECTED SEROLOGICAL FINDINGS IN BREEDERS VACCINATED AGAINST NON-TYPHOID <i>SALMONELLA</i> (Serbia)	804-814
<i>V. Dosković, S. Bogosavljević-Bošković, Z. Pavlovski, B. Milošević, Z. Škrbić, S. Rakonjac, V. Petričević</i> EFFECT OF PROTEASE ON MEAT YIELD OF BROILERS (Serbia)	815-823
<i>A. Bočarov-Stančić, J. Lević, M. Bodroža-Solarov, V. Pantić, N. Salma, J. Vučković</i> MYCOLOGICAL DETOXIFICATION OF AFLATOXIN B ₁ AND OCHRATOXIN A <i>IN VITRO</i> (Serbia).....	824-834
<i>M. Ignatova, V. Sredkova, E. Petkov, M. Todorova</i> EFFECT OF DIETARY PROBIOTIC ON EGG QUALITY (Bulgaria)	835-840
<i>M. Đukić-Stojčić, N. Milošević, L. Perić, S. Bjedov</i> PLUMAGE CONDITION AND FOOT PAD LESIONS OF MEDIUM GROWING BROILERS REARED EXTENSIVELY IN THE POULTRY HOUSE AND IN TRADITIONAL FREE RANGE (Serbia).....	841-846
<i>R. Stefanov, M. Chervenkov, E. Kistanova, D. Kacheva, B. Georgiev, P. Taushanova, G. Nenkova, A. Aleksandrova</i> LIPID PEROXIDATION AND MOTILITY OF DRAKE SPERMATOOZOA AFTER 24 HOURS OF STORAGE (Bulgaria).....	847-853
<i>L. Perić, D. Žikić, M. Đukić-Stojčić</i> EFFECT OF PRESTORAGE INCUBATION ON HATCHABILITY OF LONG-TERM STORED BROILER BREEDER EGGS (Serbia).	854-858
<i>T. Pandurevic, S. Mitrovic, V. Djermanovic, V. Djekic, M. Lalovic</i> THE INFLUENCE OF THE LOHMANN BROWN LAYING HENS' AGE ON EGG WEIGHT AND STRUCTURE (Serbia).....	859-868
<i>Lj. Janković, B. Radenković-Damnjanović, M. Vučinić, Š. Pintarič</i> MANURE TREATMENT WITH RED EARTHWORMS (<i>Lumbricus rubellus</i>) AND POSSIBILITY OF USE OF BIOMASS FOR POULTRY FEED (Serbia).....	869-883

N. Tolimir, L. Perić, N. Milošević, M. Đukić-Stojčić, M. Maslovarić
 IMPACT OF NUTRITION ON GROWTH DYNAMICS AND
 QUALITY OF BROILER CARCASS OF DIFFERENT GENOTYPES
 (Serbia)..... 884-893

F.R. Wolayan, A. Rochana, I. Setiawan, Y. A. Hidayati
 THE EFFECT OF COCONUT WASTE WITH TOFU WASTE
 MIXTURE FERMENTED BY *Aspergillus niger* ON BROILER
 PERFORMANCE (Indonesia)..... 894-901

*V. Petričević, Ž. Jokić, M. Lukić, Z. Škrbić, Z. Pavlovski, D. Vitorović,
 M. Petričević*
 EFFECT OF USE OF RAW SOYBEAN IN THE FINAL MIXTURES
 FOR BROILER CHICKENS ON BODY WEIGHT, RELATIVE
 WEIGHT OF THE PANCREAS AND THE EDIBLE INNER
 ORGANS (Serbia)..... 902-910

POSTER SECTION III

T.A. Magomadov, V.A. Shatalov
 THE RUSSIAN HISTORY OF DAIRY GOAT FARMING (Russia) 911-917

*J. Stojković, Z. Ilić, M.P. Petrović, V. Caro-Petrović, I. Đorđević, S.
 Ćirić*
 THE EFFECT OF DIFFERENT PROTEIN SOURCES IN THE DIET
 ON GOAT PRODUCTION PERFORMANCE DURING
 FATTENING (Serbia)..... 918-924

T. Ivanova, E. Raicheva
 STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF SOYPASS ON THE SHEEP MILK
 PRODUCTION (Bulgaria)..... 925-935

N. Pacinovski, G. Dimov, E. Eftimova, N. Mateva, G. Cilev
 SOME FACTORS OF THE MAXIMUM TEST DAY MILK YIELD
 IN THE DAIRY POPULATION OF SHEEP IN MACEDONIA
 (Macedonia)..... 936-941

G. Talevski
 USAGE OF PALM OIL IN THE CHEESE PRODUCTION
 (Macedonia)..... 942-951

<i>P. Slavova, S. Laleva, Y. Popova</i> COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FERTILITY IN A STANDARD MATING PROCEDURE AND AFTER HORMONAL TREATMENT TO INDUCE OESTRUS AND OVULATION (Bulgaria).....	952-958
<i>M.R. Yossifov, L.K. Kozelov, M.A. Petkova</i> EFFECT OF DRY DISTILLER' GRAINS WITH SOLUBLES FROM CORN (DDGSc) ON SOME WETHER' BIOCHEMICAL PARAMETERS (Bulgaria).....	959-969
<i>A. Katica, N. Mlačo, A. Hodžić, K. Podžo, A. Softić</i> HISTOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DUBSKA PRAMENKA PITUITARY GLAND DURING THE LACTATION PHASE (Bosnia and Herzegovina).....	970-978
<i>Y. Aleksiev, S. Stoycheva, P. Zunev, Ts. Hristova, Ts. Maslev, G. Dimov</i> THE EFFECT OF PARITY ON PARTURITION PATTERN IN BULGARIAN WHITE DAIRY GOATS (Bulgaria).....	979-985
<i>N. Memiši, S.V. Moračanin, M. Žujović, N. Stanišić, Z. Tomić</i> VARIABILITY OF PHYSICAL AND CHEMICAL PARAMETERS IN RAW SHEEP MILK DURING SEASONAL PURCHASE (Serbia)	986-993
<i>T. Harizanova–Metodieva</i> APPLYING AN ECONOMETRIC MODEL TO FORECAST THE QUANTITY OF PRODUCED SHEEP MILK (Bulgaria).....	994-1004
<i>V. Simin, I. Pihler, M. Krajinović, M. Žujović, V. Tomović</i> CARCASS PARAMETERS AND YIELD OF SAANEN MALE KIDS (Serbia).....	1005-1014
<i>I. Pusic, D. Lupulovic, J. Prodanov-Radulovic, M. Urosevic, Z. Grgic</i> SEROLOGICAL STUDY ON <i>Brucella</i> spp. AND SMALL RUMINANT LENTIVIRUS IN DAIRY GOATS IN VOJVODINA (Serbia).....	1015-1021
<i>M.R. Yossifov</i> EFFECTS OF RAPESEED MEAL AS PROTEIN SOURCE IN CEREAL-BASED DIETS ON LAMB PERFORMANCE (Bulgaria)...	1022-1031

<i>A. Cividini, M. Kastelic</i> THE EFFECT OF INTROGRESSED ROMANOV BREED ON LITTER SIZE IN IMPROVED JEZERSKO-SOLČAVA BREED (Slovenia).....	1032-1039
<i>M. Žujović, N. Stanišić, Z. Tomić, N. Maksimović, Z. Bijelić, V. Mandić</i> CARCASS CHARACTERISTICS AND SOME MEAT QUALITY PARAMETERS OF KIDS OF BALKAN GOAT BREED SLAUGHTERED AT DIFFERENT WEIGHTS (Serbia).....	1040-1048
<i>C. Pascal., Costica C.</i> RESEARCHES REGARDING THE INDUSTRIAL CROSS EFFECT BETWEEN DIFFERENT BREEDS OF SHEEP OVER THE GROWING INTENSITY AND THE SLAUGHTER INDICATORS (Romania).....	1049-1059
<i>V. Caro-Petrović, M.P. Petrović, Z. Ilić, M.M. Petrović, A. Teneva, J. Stojković, D. Ružić-Muslić</i> SOME NON-GENETIC FACTORS INFLUENCING EARLY GROWTH TRAITS OF LAMBS (Serbia).....	1060-1069
<i>Ts. Hristova, S. Stoycheva</i> APPLICATION OF THE NON-HORMONAL METHODS FOR SYNCHRONIZATION OF ESTRUS IN EWES REVIEW (Bulgaria)	1070-1075
<i>T. Popova</i> FATTY ACID COMPOSITION OF DIFFERENT ADIPOSE DEPOTS IN LAMBS REARED INDOORS AND ON PASTURE (Bulgaria).....	1076-1088
<i>A. Popović-Vranješ, A. Kasalica, F. Bauman, M. Jevtić, D. Cvetanović, G. Grubješić</i> CHARACTERISTICS OF SJENIČKI EWE'S CHEESE WITH PROTECTED DESIGNATION OF ORIGIN (Serbia).....	1089-1097
<i>M.A. Talebi</i> THE EFFECT OF SELECTION ON FATTY ACIDS COMPOSITION OF CARCASS FAT IN LORI-BAKHITIARI SHEEP (Iran).....	1098-1104
<i>R. Pivić, Đ. Glamočlija, D. Jošić, A. Stanojković-Sebić, Ž. Dželetović</i> THE POSIBILITY OF THE CERTAIN ALTERNATIVE CEREALS CULTIVATION FOR ANIMAL NUTRITION IN CLIMATIC AND SOIL CONDITIONS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA (Serbia).....	1105-1116

<i>D. Spasova, D. Spasov, B. Atanasova, M. Ilievski</i> ANALYSIS OF SOME OF THE TRAITS THAT DETERMINE THE PRODUCTIVITY OF OATS IN ORGANIC AND CONVENTIONAL PRODUCTION (Macedonia).....	1117-1125
<i>R. Dubljević, N. Đorđević, M. Damjanović, D. Mitrović</i> THE INFLUENCE OF SOWING DENSITY, COMPACTION DEGREE AND INOCULATION ON CHEMICAL COMPOSITION AND QUALITY OF MAIZE SILAGE (Serbia).....	1126-1132
<i>V. Maraš, B. Gašović, D. Drakić, J. Raičević, J. Djaković, V. Kodzulović, S. Šucur, N. Djordjević</i> INFLUENCE OF INOCULATION ON GRAPE POMACE SILAGE QUALITY SUPPLEMENTED WITH NON-PROTEIN NITROGEN (Montenegro).....	1133-1141
<i>Z. Lopičić, A. Bočarov-Stančić, M. Stojanović, J. Milojković, V. Pantić, M. Mihajlović, M. Adamović</i> <i>IN VITRO</i> MYCOTOXINS ADSORPTION BY SOUR CHERRY STONES (Serbia).....	1142-1153
<i>M. Maslovarić, B. de la Roza-Delgado, S. Janković, J. Lević, R. Jovanović</i> DEVELOPMENT OF NIR CALIBRATION MODELS TO PREDICT CHEMICAL COMPOSITION AND <i>IN VITRO</i> ORGANIC MATTER DIGESTIBILITY OF WET WHOLE MAIZE SILAGE (Serbia).....	1154-1164
<i>D. Terzić, B. Dinić, R. Stanisavljević, D. Đokić, J. Marković, J. Milenković, S. Anđelković</i> THE EFFECT OF CUTTING SCHEDULE ON ENERGY VALUE OF FIRST ALFALFA GROWTH (Serbia).....	1165-1171
<i>Z. Tomić, Z. Bijelić, V. Mandić, A. Simić, V. Caro-Petrović, M. Žujović</i> EFFECT OF N FERTILIZATION ON YIELD AND QUALITY OF GRASSES AND LEGUMES IN MONOCULTURE AND MIXTURE (Serbia).....	1172-1181
<i>J. Prodanov-Radulović, R. Došen, I. Pušić, T. Petrović, I. Stojanov</i> HEALTH STATUS CONTROL OF WILD BOARS IN THE HUNTING AREA OF VOJVODINA REGION (Serbia).....	1182-1188

<i>Z. Popović, B. Bojović, N. Dorđević, D. Beuković, M. Beuković, M. Dorđević</i> PRODUCTION RESULTS OF RING-NECKED PHEASANT PARENTS FLOCKS DEPENDING OF NUTRITION ON FARM AND YEAR (Serbia).....	1189-1195
<i>Ž. Mihaljev, M. Živkov-Baloš, M. Kapetanov, S. Jakšić</i> DETERMINATION OF TOXIC ELEMENTS IN WILD BIRDS FROM THE AREA OF VOJVODINA (Serbia).....	1196-1203
<i>G. Angelov, I. Dimitrova, T. Mehmedov, P. Stamberov, N. Stancheva, S. Georgieva, G. Nakev</i> STUDIES ON SOME SERUM ENZYMES IN TWO BULGARIAN INDIGENOUS SHEEP BREEDS (Bulgaria).....	1204-1208
<i>S. Grigorova, M. Petkova, K. Velikov</i> BIOLOGICAL EFFECT ESTABLISHMENT OF <i>JODIS CONCENTRATE</i> SUPPLEMENTATION IN RABBIT DOES (Bulgaria).....	1209-1216
<i>K. Velikov</i> INFLUENCE OF MATING UNTIL 48-TH HOUR POST WEANING ON THE REPRODUCTIVE PARAMETERS IN WHITE NEW ZEALAND RABBIT DOES (Bulgaria).....	1217-1224
<i>M. Dyavolova, D. Gudev, I. Yanchev, P. Moneva</i> FUNCTIONAL ACTIVITY OF THE ADRENAL GLANDS, RECTAL TEMPERATURE AND SOME HEMATOLOGICAL INDICES IN RABBITS REARED UNDER LOW AND HIGH INDOOR AMMONIA LEVELS (Bulgaria).....	1225-1237
<i>J. Tkaczewska, W. Migdał, M. Walczycka, P. Kulawik, P. Bajzik</i> THE COMPARISON OF NUTRITIONAL AND MICROBIOLOGICAL QUALITY OF CARP (<i>Cyprinus carpio</i> L.) AND RAINBOW TROUT (<i>Oncorhynchus mykiss</i>) FARMED IN SLOVAKIA AND POLAND (Poland).....	1238-1251
<i>S. Lazić, D. Lupulović, G. Lazić, P. Gavrilović, D. Bugarski, T. Petrović</i> RESEARCH ON INCIDENCE AND EFFECTS OF VIRAL ARTERITIS ON HEALTH STATUS OF HORSES AT STABLES (Serbia).....	1252-1259

THE PHENOTYPIC VARIABILITY OF PRODUCTION TRAITS IN THE POPULATION OF SIMMENTAL COWS

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Invited paper

Abstract: The breeding objective for the Simmental breed of cattle is to achieve maximum genetic values for economically important traits, in line with the economic effects of genetic improvement, which this breed has achieved in developed countries. The present study included 302 Simmental cows selected as bull dams on the territory of the Republic of Serbia in the course of one year. The impacts of paragenetic factors and lactation on production traits (milk yield and fertility) were examined. Order of lactation influenced highly significant deviations ($P < 0.01$) in milk yield, milk fat content, milk fat yield and 4% FCM from the general average, as well as slight variations in the length of gestation and lactation, calving interval and service period, that were not statistically significant ($P > 0.05$). Simmental bull dams included in the present study, in the lactation period of 311.45 days, have realized milk yield of 5754.49 kg with 3.98% and 230.24 kg of milk fat and 5755.47 kg of 4% FCM. Average duration of gestation of tested heads was 286.31 days, the service period 110.37 days, and calving interval 398.44 days. Overall comprehension and understanding of a number of paragenetic factors and their interactions on specific production characteristics can have impact on improvement of milk yield and fertility in cows.

Key words: fertility, milk yield, Simmental breed, lactation.

Introduction

Simmental cows in the Republic of Serbia are reared in semi-intensive conditions of housing, care and feeding, or on small farms with a few animals, to farms with dozens of breeding animals in a more intensive system of rearing. Genetic improvement of Simmental cattle in the country is achieved by selection and breeding, in a pure breed. At one time there were attempts to introduce genes of red

Holstein breed to improve milk production traits and milkability (*Petrović, M.M. et al 2009*).

The necessity of continuous improvement of the production of milk, milk fat and milk proteins imposes the need for systematic work on all levels related to the aforementioned production. Their general characteristic is that they are quantitative genetic traits and their degree of phenotypic expression depends on the interaction of genotype and environment in which production takes place. In order to achieve high milk and milk fat yield it is needed, in addition to a strict selection process, to provide adequate production conditions, particularly with regard to nutrition, then rearing and care (*Pantelić 2006*).

By examining the production potential of first calving Simmental cows calved in the period 2007-2010 on individual farms in Serbia, *Nikšić et al. (2011)* found that their average milk production of 4348 kg of milk with milk fat content of 3.93% and milk fat yield of 171.1 kg. With the exception of year 2009, milk yield in first calving heifers continuously increased on average by about 100 kg of milk per animal per year.

Panić and Vidović (2006) have conducted study of the heritability of important milk traits of Simmental cows on two farms in Vojvodina. First lactation lasted in average a long time - 350 days, as a consequence of late first insemination on these farms. Cows realized in standard lactation average milk production of 4298 kg, with the milk fat yield and content of 170 kg and 3.98%, respectively. Average yield of 4% FCM was 4277 kg.

Reproduction in intensive cattle production is the most important phase because it provides animals for renewal of the herd, milk production and fattening, i.e. meat production.

Croatian Livestock Selection Center (2003) provides some indicators of the reproduction of Simmental cattle population. The average age of registered cows in first lactation was 28 months, and the duration of the service period 120 days.

Bielfeldt et al. (2004) have established the average duration of service period of 92.9 days and of the calving interval 384.5 days. They have also concluded that the year and season of calving have a highly significant effect ($P < 0.01$) on the duration of service period and calving interval.

Given the high economic importance of fertility traits in cattle it is necessary to know certain factors affecting fertility in cows. The fertility of cows is much more influenced by environmental factors because most of the variation of reproductive traits are affected by them. When analyzing individual factors, their impact on the fertility of cows is different, and also complex action is possible. More comprehensive knowledge of the impact of certain factors on specific reproductive traits may improve fertility in cows (*Trifunović et al., 2004*).

Petrović M. D. et al. (2005), have analyzed the effect of paragenetic factors on production traits in complete lactations in Simmental cows. The influence of lactation on all production traits was highly significant, $p < 0.01$ with the exception of duration complete lactations where the impact was not statistically significant, $p > 0.05$.

Material and methods

Simmental breed is the breed most present in Serbia, where the total number of cattle population is about 908,990 animals, of which about 525,000 cows and heifers. In the breed structure of cattle in Serbia, it is estimated that the Simmental breed makes up about 80%, the group of Black and White Holstein-Friesian cattle around 10%, while the primitive breeds and cross-breeds account for about 10% of the total number of cattle. Active population of Simmental cattle in the Republic of Serbia comprise only animals that are included in the main animal recording/registration system (about 90,000 head or 17%). The breeding objective for the Simmental breed of cattle is to achieve maximum genetic values for economically important traits in line with the economic effects of genetic improvement, which this breed has achieved in developed countries (*Pantelić et al. 2011*).

This study included 302 Simmental cows selected as bull dams on the territory of the Republic of Serbia in the course of one year. Selection of cows into the herd of bull dams was performed after completion of the first, and based on the subsequent lactations.

The study included the following properties of milk throughout the lactation:

- Duration of lactation, days
- Milk yield, kg
- Milk fat content, %
- Milk fat yield, kg
- Yield of 4% FCM, kg

Correction of milk yield at 4% FCM was performed using the Gaines-Davidson's formula:

$$4\% \text{ FCM} = 0.4 M + 15 F$$

Where:

M - milk yield

F - milk fat yield

The following reproductive traits were investigated:

- Duration of pregnancy (days)
- Duration of service period (days)
- Duration of the interval between calving (days)

The impact of paragenetic factors and order of lactation on production traits (milk yield and fertility) was examined. Analysis of the impact of paragenetic factors on milk production traits and fertility was carried out by the method of least squares, using a fixed model:

$$Y_{ml} = \mu + L_l + e_{ml}$$

Where:

Y_{ml} = Expression of the studied trait of cow m , which produced in lactation l

μ = general average

L_l = fixed effect of l order of lactation

e_{ml} = random error

Results and Discussion

Study of the duration of lactation has practical importance because it is through this trait that the utilization efficiency of dairy cows in milk production can be estimated. Duration of lactation is related to the duration of the service period. Earlier drying due to lower milk production leads to the problems in regard to the body condition and at calving. Poor diet does not shorten the lactation but decreases the yield of milk and adversely affects the reproduction. Prolonged lactation indicates that the cows are not inseminated in optimal time, or are dried on time.

Table 1. General average (μ), deviation from the general average ($\hat{\epsilon}$), least square mean values (lsm) and their errors (S) and significance of studied effects on duration of lactation, days

Effects	N	$\hat{\epsilon}$	Sc	lsm	SlsM
<i>General average</i>					
μ	975	311.45	2.24		
<i>Lactations^{ns}</i>		$f_{tab} = 11,019$		$df_1 = 6$	$df_2 = 949$
I	292	-3.66	4.96	307.79	3.01
II	230	-2.31	3.43	309.14	1.74
III	170	-3.49	2.15	307.96	1.54
IV	116	-0.04	1.57	311.41	2.64
V	81	-0.67	2.36	310.77	4.11
VI	48	1.74	3.80	313.19	5.72
$\geq VII$	38	8.42	5.81	319.86	7.84
ns – P>0.05		* – P<0.05		** – P<0.01	

Table 2. General average (μ), deviation from the general average ($\hat{\epsilon}$), least square mean values (lsm) and their errors (S) and significance of studied effects on milk yield in complete lactation, kg

Effects	N	$\hat{\epsilon}$	Sc	lsm	Slsm
General average					
μ	975	5754.49	109.80		
Lactations **		$f_{tab} = 17,808$		$df_1 = 6$	$df_2 = 949$
I	292	-927.92	242.56	4826.57	147.48
II	230	-232.67	167.83	5521.82	84.94
III	170	139.15	105.13	5893.64	75.25
IV	116	274.07	76.77	6028.56	129.10
V	81	321.71	115.33	6076.21	200.90
VI	48	301.18	185.86	6055.68	279.63
\geq VII	38	124.48	284.25	5878.97	383.58
ns – P>0.05		* – P<0.05		** – P<0.01	

Based on the results presented in Table 1 it can be concluded that the average duration of lactation period was 311.45 days. Minimum duration of the lactation period was 307.79 days and maximum of 319.86 days.

Similar results were obtained in the research by *Perišić (1998)*, and higher and significantly higher values were obtained by *Petrović (2000)*, *Perišić et al. (2002)*, *Panić and Vidović (2006)*.

From Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5, it can be concluded that the lactation influenced the incidence of highly significant deviations ($P < 0.01$) in milk yield, milk fat content, milk fat yield and 4% FCM from the general average.

Table 3. General average (μ), deviation from the general average ($\hat{\epsilon}$), least square mean values (lsm) and their errors (S) and significance of studied effects on milk fat content in complete lactation, %

Effects	N	$\hat{\epsilon}$	Sc	lsm	Slsm
General average					
μ	975	3.987	0.016		
Lactations **		$f_{tab} = 6,660$		$df_1 = 6$	$df_2 = 949$
I	292	-0.213	0.035	3.774	0.021
II	230	-0.134	0.024	3.854	0.012
III	170	-0.076	0.015	3.911	0.011
IV	116	-0.019	0.011	3.968	0.019
V	81	0.061	0.017	4.048	0.029
VI	48	0.140	0.027	4.128	0.040
\geq VII	38	0.241	0.041	4.229	0.056
ns – P>0.05		* – P<0.05		** – P<0.01	

Milk production is characterized by a regular trend of increase in the subsequent lactations, so that the minimum milk yield is in the first lactation, where the deviation from the general average was - 927.92 kg, and the maximum in the fifth with a deviation from the general average of 321.71 kg. Highly significant effect ($P<0.01$) of lactation on milk yield has also been established by *Trifunovic et al. (2002)*.

The situation is identical with the milk fat content, since the trend of increase is present starting from the first lactation, 3.77% to 4.23% in the seventh lactation.

The lactation highly significantly ($P<0.01$) influenced the variability of milk fat yield. The first lactation had the greatest negative deviation from the average of -49.31 kg, and therefore the lowest yield 180.94 kg. Milk fat yield gradually increased to 250.86 kg in the sixth lactation which is marked with the highest positive deviation 20.62 kg. Approximately similar results were obtained in the research by *Trifunović et al. (2002)*, *Petrović M.D et al. (2005)*, who found highly significant effect of lactation on milk fat yield.

For the purpose of more efficient comparison of milk production, 4% fat - corrected milk is often used. The effect of lactation was highly significant ($P<0.01$) on the yield of 4% FCM. The minimum yield was realized in the first lactation 4644.66 kg with a deviation from the general average of -1,110.81 kg. The yield gradually increased until the sixth lactation, which was 6185.25 kg with maximum deviation of 429.79 kg.

Table 4. General average (μ), deviation from the general average ($\hat{\epsilon}$), least square mean values (lsm) and their errors (S) and significance of studied effects on milk fat yield in complete lactation, kg

Effects	N	$\hat{\epsilon}$	Sc	lsm	Slsm
<i>General average</i>					
μ	975	230.24	4.56		
<i>Lactations **</i>		$f_{tab} = 16,715$		$df_1 = 6$	$df_2 = 949$
I	292	-49.31	10.07	180.94	6.12
II	230	-17.53	6.97	212.72	3.53
III	170	0.54	4.36	230.78	3.12
IV	116	9.56	3.19	239.81	5.36
V	81	16.47	4.79	246.71	8.34
VI	48	20.62	7.71	250.86	11.60
\geq VII	38	19.65	11.80	249.89	15.92
ns – $P>0.05$		* – $P<0.05$		** – $P<0.01$	

Table 5. General average (μ), deviation from the general average (\hat{c}), least square mean values (lsm) and their errors (S) and significance of studied effects on yield of 4%FCM in complete lactation, kg

Effects	N	\hat{c}	Sc	lsm	Slsm
General average					
μ	975	5755.47	111.71		
Lactations **		$f_{lab} = 17,236$		$df_1 = 6$	$df_2 = 949$
I	292	-1110.81	246.78	4644.66	150.05
II	230	-355.98	170.75	5399.49	86.42
III	170	63.74	106.96	5819.21	76.56
IV	116	253.07	78.10	6008.54	131.35
V	81	375.68	117.34	6131.15	204.39
VI	48	429.79	189.09	6185.25	284.50
$\geq VII$	38	344.51	289.19	6099.97	390.26
ns - P>0.05		* - P<0.05		** - P<0.01	

Based on results presented in the paper, it can be concluded that Simmental cows included in the present study, significantly increased milk and milk fat yield to the age of approximately 7 years, i.e. during the first five lactations. After the 7. Year of age or after the fifth lactation milk yield stagnated, and subsequently started to decline significantly to reach approximately the level of the first calving heifers at the age of 15 or 16 years.

Knowledge of the impact of external factors on the milk properties and fertility is very important with respect to their importance in achieving breeding goals and good economic results.

Table 6. General average, least square mean values and their errors, and significance of the effect of lactation on reproductive traits

Lactation	Durat. of gestation		Service period		Calving interval	
	LSM	Slsm	LSM	Slsm	LSM	Slsm
Gen.average	286.31		110.37		398.44	
1.	284.39	0.54	112.38	4.68	398.17	4.50
2.	285.88	0.62	109.94	5.23	396.13	5.05
3.	285.93	0.61	98.65	5.94	385.91	5.96
4.	286.73	0.83	106.31	7.21	392.84	7.04
5.	285.93	0.96	111.82	7.97	397.66	8.01
6.	284.99	1.15	110.15	10.55	397.35	10.30
$\geq 7.$	285.65	1.32	113.52	11.86	400.34	11.82
F-test	$f_{lab} = 1.251^{ns}$		$f_{lab} = 0.935^{ns}$		$f_{lab} = 0.774^{ns}$	

NS - P > 0.05; * - P < 0.05; ** - P < 0.01

Problems with fertility have become one of the most expensive factors in dairy cattle production. Selection for maternal fertility is becoming increasingly important, and requires its greater involvement in the total breeding merit/breeding value. If there are serious problems in reproduction, in addition to direct effects on milk and milk fat production, difficulties occur in the normal implementation of the herd renewal, which reflects on the cost of production (*Pantelić et al. 2009*).

The general average of least square mean values of duration of gestation corrected for the impact of lactation was 286.31 days.

Environmental factors, i.e. lactation had no significant effect on this trait ($P>0.05$). This can be explained by the fact that the duration of gestation is a biological constant characteristic of the particular species on which external factors have limited effect.

Average service period in studied Simmental cows was 110.37 days. Lactation had no effect ($P>0.05$) on the duration of service period (Table 6). This is also confirmed by research results of *Stojić et al. (1993)*. *Pantelić et al. (2008)* have established, by the method of least squares, average service period of 115.19 days and age at first calving of 795.53 days of first calving Simmental cows kept on individual farms.

Most of the research related to the duration of the service period have indicated that its optimal duration should be up to 90 days, during which time a full involution of the genital organs is completed, and they are ready for the next conception, on the other hand, it is also the best time period from the economic point of view with regard to the natural course of lactation of cows.

Calving interval is the best indicator of cow fertility. Its duration is directly related to the duration of the service period and duration of gestation. Calving period lasted on average of 398.44 days. Lactation caused slight variations in calving period, which were not statistically significant ($P>0.05$).

Conclusion

Since the fastest genetic improvement through selection and improvement of production performance is through sire-son line, selection of bull dams and sires should be given the utmost attention.

Knowledge of the impact of external factors on the properties of milk and fertility is very important with respect to their importance in achieving of breeding goals and good economic results.

Selection for maternal fertility is becoming increasingly important, and requires its greater involvement in the evaluation of total merit/breeding value. If there are serious problems in reproduction, in addition to direct effects on milk and

milk fat production, difficulties arise in the normal implementation of the renewal of the herd, which reflects on the cost of production.

In order to achieve high milk and milk fat yield, satisfactory fertility, in addition to strict selection, it is necessary to provide adequate rearing conditions, especially in regard to nutrition, housing and care.

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Fenotipska varijabilnost proizvodnih osobina u populaciji krava simentalске rase

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Rezime

Odgajivački cilj za simentalску rasu goveda je postizanje maksimalnih genetskih vrednosti za ekonomski važne osobine, a u skladu sa ekonomskim efektima genetskog poboljšanja, koju je ova rasa postigla u razvijenim zemljama sveta.

Ovim istraživanjem su obuhvaćene 302 krave simentalске rase odabrane u kategoriju bikovskih majki na području Republike Srbije u toku jedne godine. Ispitani su uticaji paragenetskih faktora i reda laktacije na proizvodne osobine (mlečnost i plodnost). Red laktacije uticao je na pojavu visoko značajnih odstupanja od opšteg proseka ($P < 0,01$) u prinosu mleka, sadržaju i prinosu mlečne masti i 4% MKM, kao i na neznatna variranja dužine bremenitosti i laktacije, međutelidbenog intervala i servis perioda, koja nisu bila statistički značajna ($P > 0,05$).

Bikovske majke simentalске rase obuhvaćene ovim ispitivanjima za laktaciju u trajanju od 311,45 dana, ostvarile su proizvodnju mleka od 5.754,49kg, sa 3,98% i 230,24kg mlečne masti, odnosno 5.755,47kg 4% MKM. Prosečno trajanje bremenitosti ispitivanih grla iznosilo je 286,31 dana, servis perioda 110,37 dana, i međutelidbenog intervala 398,44 dana.

Celokupnim sagledavanjem i poznavanjem većeg broja paragenetskih faktora, kao i njihovih međusobnih interakcija na određene proizvodne osobine može se uticati na poboljšanje mlečnosti i plodnosti krava.

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