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ECHINO-SAFE-MED: AN INTERNATIONAL PROJECT TO CONTROL CYSTIC ECHINOCOCCOSIS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA

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ECHINO-SAFE-MED (New sustainable tools and innovative actions to control cystic ECHINOcoccosis in sheep farms in the MEDiterranean area: improvement of diagnosis and SAFETy in response to climatic changes) is a three-year project started in May 2021 to control cystic echinococcosis (CE) in the Mediterranean area. The main aim of the project is to implement the pasture-based livestock farming systems by delivering sustainable and cost-effective tools, as well as innovative strategies to control CE in sheep farms with the final goal to improve the health, welfare, and productivity of the small ruminant livestock sector in the Mediterranean regions. This will be obtained using high throughput diagnostic, surveillance and control strategies in order to establish guidelines for sustainable CE control to be further extended to other endemic Mediterranean areas.

With this as the main tenet, ECHINO-SAFE-MED has 3 macro-objectives as summarized below:

- To develop novel diagnostic tools for early detection of cystic echinococcosis in sheep in Mediterranean countries of Europe (i.e. France, Greece and Italy) and transfer these methodologies to the Mediterranean areas in North Africa (i.e. Algeria and Tunisia).
- To improve surveillance and control activities for CE in Mediterranean areas using innovative sustainable strategies to be applied in highly endemic areas.
- To strengthen capacity for CE diagnosis, surveillance and control in both Africa and Europe through training & effective communication of project outcomes to project partners and relevant stakeholders, policy-makers and end users.

The objectives of this project will be achieved through the construction of an international network for sharing practices, methods and data to promote in a concerted and organized way, efficient approaches to help animals and farming systems to adapt to climate change. Furthermore, a multi-level approach will be adopted, involving local participating vets and national sheep farmer's organizations to collect information on common practices per country/region and assess the farmers' attitude towards sustainable helminth control and their potential adoption for novel diagnostics and novel concepts of CE control.

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