

Estimated reading time: 7 minute(s)

Introduction

Sheep and **goats** are **small ruminants** kept as livestock and they **form the backbone of most rural livelihood** in agricultural industries across the globe.

Sheep rearing is a **common practice in arid and semi-arid regions which contributes significantly to the livelihood** and nutritional security of resource poor communities as they hedge against the losses in agriculture (Amareswari *et al.*, 2018).

This brings us to our discussion today, on Karakul sheep farming in the world.

The Karakul sheep is believed to be one of the oldest domesticated sheep breed in the world and originates from Bukhara region in Kazakhstan, Central Asia (Bravenboer, 2007). In the early 19th century Karakul sheep farming spread in many countries like Afghanistan, United States of America, Turkey, Russia, Namibia, Botswana and South Africa.

How Karakul sheep derive their names in different parts of the world:

- Commonly known as **Swakara sheep** in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa
- **Astrakhan sheep** in Russia
- **Persian lamb** in Italy
- **Garaköli bagana** in Turkey

Karakul sheep and its association with the fashion industry

Despite that Karakul sheep pelt production is quite a sensitive industry hence, euthanasia methods of lamb slaughter are complied with and adhered to as stated in the Code of Practice (CoP) for the Care and Handling of Karakul Sheep.

Karakul lamb pelts are harvested within 48 hours post parturition if not, the curl structure of the pelt deteriorates with increase in age (Martins and Peters, 1992) and often done by well-trained personnel. The distinct features of the curl type are directly proportional to pelt price.

What characteristics are considered during pelt grading?

- **Hair length** is a vital component during grading such that, for every millimeter gained the leather thickens by adding weight and bulkiness when manufacturing garments and this directly affects pelt price.
- **The four main curl types are water silk, shallow, developed shallow and pipe curl.**

Further processing of Karakul pelts

Pelts of various colors are graded and sent to Copenhagen, Denmark bi-annually in April and September. Designers purchase and further process these pelts into unique garments of various colors that are well sought after in the fashion industry.

These pelts are sown and processed into various garments such as **jackets, shoes, bags and belts**. White pelts are highly on demand as they can be dyed into various colors, hence a **unique** advantage.

Competitive industry

The Karakul pelts auctioned at Copenhagen compete with the mink and fox skins too. It is unique to note that Karakul pelts are auctioned and sold within an hour.

What is unique about Karakul sheep?

- Profoundly kept for pelts that are sought after in the fashion industry
- A hardy sheep breed that thrives well in arid to semi-arid areas
- Also reared for meat and wool production
- Improvement of rural livelihood through income earned from Karakul pelt sales

Primary colors of the Karakul sheep

- **Black, Brown, White, Grey** and many different tones that may arise from a combination of these colors.

Conclusion

In summary, **Karakul sheep significantly contribute to the livelihood of communities farming** with the breed therefore, as Karakul farmers let us work towards the preservation of such vital breeds and are directly linked to the fashion industry.

References

<https://karakulsheep.files.wordpress.com/2016/01/karakul-sheep-lc-news-spring-2015.pdf>

Karakul sheep and its association with the fashion industry

<https://www.kopenhagenfur.com/en/our-fur/swakara/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5626511/>

Amareswari, P, M. G. Prakash, B. Ekambaram, M. Mahendar, and C. H. Krishna. 2018. Molecular genetics studies on Nellore and Deccani sheep using microsatellite markers. *Indian J. Anim. Res.* 52(6): 805-810. DOI: 10.18805/ijar.B-3300.

Bravenboer, B. 2007. *Karakul-Gift from the Arid Land Namibia 1907-2007*. Karakul Board of Namibia and the Karakul Breeders' Society of Namibia. Windhoek, Namibia.

Martins, C, and K. J. Peters. 1992. Alternative use of Karakul sheep for pelt and lamb

production in Botswana. I. Reproduction and growth performance. *Small Ruminant Research.* 9: 1-10.