South African sheep breeds: Damara

**SCOPE:** This Info-pack provides a brief description of the Damara sheep breed.

**KEY WORDS:** Type, Origin, Description, Production, Products, Distribution, Numbers.


**Type**
Indigenous fat-tailed meat breed.

![Photo: Dawie Du Toit Damara Stud](image)

The hair is mostly short. Young sheep have longish hair with more woolliness. They shed this when they get older. Glossy hair is the desired type.

The Damara sheep is predominantly a horned sheep, polls do occur, though more in ewes than in rams. Rams have well-developed spiral horns which stand well away from the head. The legs are long and strong, with well shaped hooves. The fat tail is wedge-shaped, narrow and long, stretching to below the hock.

**Origin of the breed**
Fat tailed sheep arrived in South Africa between 200 and 400 AD. The Damara, Herero, Namaqua and the Kam Karrin Khoisan tribes farmed and traded with what has become the Damara sheep of today. The name is derived from the Damara area of Namibia.

The commercialisation and characterisation of the breed started at the Omatjienne Research Station near Otjiwarongo in Namibia in the late 1950’s and early 1960s. Information from Omatjienne generated interest in the breed in South Africa and led to the importation of animals and the eventual establishment of the South African Damara Sheep Breeders’ Society in 1992.

**Description**
The Damara sheep is a fairly large sheep. It is a long-bodied, fat-tailed sheep. They can be unicoloured (black, brown or white) or multicoloured (combination of colours).

![Photo: Dawie Du Toit Damara Stud](image)

**Production norms**
Damara ewes can be mated throughout the year and are ideally suited for accelerated lambing systems.

Age at first lambing = 15 months of age

Damara ewes have very strong maternal characteristics. Damaras always gather in a group with the lambs on the inside, making it difficult for jackals and lynx to get to them. A Damara ewe will always protect her lamb (flock / herd instinct).
### Damara weights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Rams (kg)</th>
<th>Ewes (kg)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth weight</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-day weight</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature weight</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Products

- **Meat** - The carcass is regarded as a fat-tailed type. The meat of the Damara sheep is juicy, tasty, flavoursome, has a fine texture and not mottled with fat. The fat on the carcass is generally a thin layer of 1 – 2 mm, which makes it ideally suited to the preferences of the modern consumer.
- **Fat tail** - External fat is mainly located in the tail. This tail fat is of the highest quality with a fine white texture and is an ideal ingredient in sausage.
- **Skins** – The low fat content of the skin and the superb fineness of the grain of the skin is the reason why Damara sheepskins produce leather that is among the best quality in the world. Damara leather is superior as far as tensile and tear strength are concerned.

![Photo: Damara.com](https://example.com/damara_com.jpg)

![Photo: Abc.net.au](https://example.com/abc_net_au.jpg)

Grain pattern of different Damara sheep skins

### Normal production environment

- **Arid, semi-desert conditions.** The Damara is well adapted to the hot, dry savannah country of South Africa.
- **Most commercial farmers are concentrated in the Northern Cape.** Smaller flocks are also found in the Free State and Gauteng.

### Breed numbers

The breed society currently has 37 members. The total number of Damara sheep in South Africa is unknown.

### References

This info-pack was compiled from various sources of information. The text may contain extracts from the following:


www.damarasheep.co.za/breedstandards