



South African sheep breeds: Dorper

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

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

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Type

Locally developed composite meat breed.



Photo: Dorper Journal

Origin of the breed

The Dorper is the result of one of the most successful long-term livestock improvement programs in South Africa. During the 1930s it became clear that a new breed was needed that could produce a carcass of high quality in the dry areas of South Africa. Persian and Dorset Horn sheep were crossed and evaluated in a series of co-operative trials with the Department of Agriculture (Grootfontein) and sheep farmers in the Northern Cape between 1933 and 1946. Their aim was to develop a hardy mutton sheep capable of surviving, reproducing and producing fast-growing lambs off the veld in the low rainfall areas of the country. The Dorper Sheep Breeders' Society was established in 1950.

Several breeders decided at the time to concentrate on the breeding of a white sheep (Mr Graham Rous, Middelburg, Eastern Cape played a leading role). They continued with trials on the

Dorset Horn X Black headed Persian X Van Rooy cross. This sheep was initially known as the "Dorsie". A separate breeders' association was established but it was later decided that it would be to the advantage of the breed to affiliate with the South African Dorper Breeders' Association because its aim was to breed the same type of sheep as the Dorper except for the colour. This affiliation occurred in 1964.



Photo: Bradandorpers.com



Photo: Bybloswhitedorper.com

Description

Dorpers: A white sheep with black confined to the head and neck is the ideal. Black spots, to a limited extent on the body and legs are permissible, but an entirely white sheep or a sheep predominantly black is undesirable. Brown hair around the eyes, white teats, white under the tail and white hoofs are undesirable.

White Dorpers: A white sheep, fully pigmented around the eyes, under the tail, on the udder and the teats is the ideal. A limited number of other coloured spots is permissible on the ears and underline.



Photo: Dorper Journal

A sheep with a good weight for its age is the ideal. Discrimination against extremely small or extremely big animals must be exercised. Too much localisation of fat on any part of the body is undesirable.

The ideal cover is a short, loose, light covering of hair and wool with wool predominating on the forequarter and with a natural clean kemp underline. Too much wool or hair is undesirable. Exclusively wool or hair is a fault. Manes are a disqualifier.

Production norms

Growth and slaughter traits of hair and wool type Dorper lambs at Carnarvon Experimental Station

Trait	Hair	Wool
Birth weight (kg)	4.0	4.1
Weaning weight (kg)	30.1	30.0
Daily gain from birth to weaning (g/day)	246	246
9-month weight (kg)	48.2	47.8
12-month weight (kg)	64.4	63.5
Slaughter weight (kg)	40.1	39.8
Carcass weight (kg)	19.2	19.6
Age at slaughter (days)	264	266
Dressing percentage	49.0	49.9
Carcass length (cm)	107.2	108.5
V3-fat depth (mm)	5.6	5.8

Young ewes could be mated for the first time at 7 months of age, depending on the environment and their body weight at that age. Young Dorper ewes mated at 7 months of age at an average weight of 40 kg at Carnarvon Experimental Station had a conception rate of 65% and weaning percentage (number of lambs weaned per number of ewes mated) of 60%.

Reproductive performance of hair and wool Dorper ewes at Carnarvon Experimental Station

Trait	Average
Body weight (kg)	56.5
Ewes lambed / ewes mated (%)	84.0
Lambs born / ewe mated (%)	126.0
Lambs born / ewe lambing (%)	149.0
Survival rate from birth till weaning (%)	96.0
Lambs weaned / ewe mated (%)	114
kg Lamb weaned / ewe/ year	34.0

Products

- Meat - The Diamond Dorper trade mark guarantees tender and juicy meat on a well-rounded carcass with fairly lean to medium fat covering.
- Skins – The skin of the Dorper has no creasing and has a smooth grain. It is used for the production of high quality clothing and gloves. These skins are a sought after export product and few are used in the local industry.

Normal production environment

- Arid to semi-arid grassveld and savannah grassveld
- Originally bred for the dry areas, but is successfully farmed with across the country as well as outside our borders
- The majority of Dorper sheep occur in the more arid areas of the country (Karoo, Kalahari). They do, however, occur across the country as a whole.

Breed numbers

At present, there are 592 breeders registered with the Dorper Sheep Breeders' Society, who have more than 83 000 animals. The total number of Dorper 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.dorpersa.co.za/info/breedstandards