



South African sheep breeds: Letelle

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

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

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Type

Locally developed fine wool meat breed.



Photo: Letelle Breeders' Society

Origin of the breed

The Letelle descends from the Spanish Merino. In 1785 Spanish Merinos found a home on the French Government's experimental farm Rambouillet just outside of Paris, and became known as Rambouillets. From France they were exported to other countries including South Africa.

In 1921 - 1922 the original breeder of the Letelle, the late T.P. van der Walt, acquired 35 large, plain-bodied ewes carrying fine wool from the Barkley East district. They were mainly of the Rambouillet type. He also acquired 3 rams with the same qualities to serve as a nucleus for his breeding plans. His ideal was to breed a polled Merino sheep capable of yielding the maximum amount of wool and mutton per grazing unit. His aim was that the progeny of these sheep would produce good quality mutton at an early age and carry true Merino wool, therefore a balanced Merino adapted to South Africa's harsh climate.

Only after 25 years of constructive breeding, when he himself was convinced that the type of sheep was indeed the specific type which could without failure transmit the desired uniform quality wool and good conformation and good mutton traits, he declared himself willing to introduce the sheep to the public. This introduction appeared in "Die Landbouweekblad" in September 1935.

Van der Walt decided to name the breed the Letelle, after Jan Letelle, a Basutu captain who lived in the time of Moshesh in the Zastron area. On 24 Augustus 1951, a breeders' society was established.



Photo: Letelle.co.za



Photo: Letelle Breeders' Society

Description

Medium framed sheep with a mutton conformation carrying fine white wool.

Production norms

Production of adult Letelle ewes at Grootfontein

Trait	Average
Body weight (kg)	58.2
Greasy wool (kg)	2.8
Clean yield (%)	67.5
Clean wool (kg)	1.9
Fibre diameter (μm)	18.4
Staple length (mm)	85.2
Staple strength (N/Ktex)	30.8

Lambs born / 100 ewes mated: 125

Lambs weaned / 100 ewes mated: 110

Production of Letelle ram and ewe lambs at Grootfontein

Trait	Rams	Ewes
Birth weight (kg)	4.5	4.2
Weaning weight (kg)	25.3	23.7
8-month weight (kg)	37.6	32.6
12-month weight (kg)	48.1	39.3
13 month wool traits		
Greasy wool (kg)	3.4	3.1
Clean yield (%)	63.7	64.5
Clean wool (kg)	2.0	1.9
Staple length (mm)	78.4	81.0
Fibre diameter (μm)	16.4	17.0
Staple strength (N/Ktex)	31.6	32.5



Photo: freestatesheepdogs.wordpress.com/letelle-sheep

Products

Seventy percent of the breed's income comes from meat and 30% from wool production.

- Meat – Ideal fat distribution and lambs have a high daily gain and feed conversion ratio in the feedlot.
- Wool – Fine white wool, which vary very little over the fleece in terms of fibre diameter.



Photo: freestatesheepdogs.wordpress.com/letelle-sheep

Normal production environment

Letelle sheep are found in the Free State, Northern Cape, Western Cape and Eastern Cape provinces.

Breed numbers

The breeders' society currently has 100 members. The total number of Letelle 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.letelle.co.za