



## South African sheep breeds: Meatmaster

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

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

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### Type

Locally developed composite non-fat-tailed meat breed.



Photo: F.W. Peters

### Origin of the breed

The Meatmaster is a composite sheep breed developed in South Africa. Since the late 1980s a number of sheep farmers realized that there was a national as well as an international need for an adaptable, economically viable and marketable mutton sheep, which can produce on the veld with minimum care and low input costs. Based on the vision that by combining the characteristics of hardiness and fertility exhibited by the Damara sheep of Southern Africa and the much sought after conformation of the Ile de France and Dorper types of sheep, a new composite mutton sheep breed could be created which would meet these requirements, a number of breeding programs were implemented by sheep breeders at different localities, who were not initially aware of each other.

During the late 1980s Dr Vermeulen's family in the Hopetown district bred a number of Damara X Dorper ewes which were subsequently mated with Van Rooy rams. In the early 1990s F.W.

Peters in the Vereeniging district bred a number of sheep by using five different Ile de France ewe bloodlines and three unrelated Damara ram bloodlines. During approximately the same period, C.R. Collett in the Venterstad district of the Eastern Cape, bred a fairly large number of White Dorper X Damara sheep as well as a number of other Damara crossbreds. Subsequent selection led to a Meatmaster type of sheep.

On 23 May 2000 a meeting of a number of sheep breeders coordinated by C.R. Collett, was held at La Rochelle near Venterstad with the view to establish a new Breeders' Society for these Damara crossbred sheep. It was decided that the breed name to be used will be the Meatmaster.



Photo: C.R. Collett

It is recommended that the Meatmaster should have 50% Damara blood, a Dorper component and it may include varying components from Ile de France, Van Rooy, SA Mutton Merino, Dormer, Wiltshire Horn and other sheep breeds. The Damara contributed specifically to adaptability, the characteristic of colour variation and coat shedding ability. The contribution of the Ile de France, Dorper and Mutton Merino breeds were primarily aimed at the improvement of

conformation and carcass quality. The Van Rooy breed was introduced to improve coat covering characteristics.

The Meatmaster was registered as a breed in 2007 and reproclaimed as a “locally adapted and regularly introduced breed” in October 2009. The Meatmaster Breed Society was approved as a society in 2008.

When selecting the genes necessary for the development of the Meatmaster all emphasis was placed on two aspects for consideration:

- What a sheep breed needs to keep costs as low as possible
- What a breed needs for high fertility and production to maximise income.

### Description

The breed is of average size with a functional efficient conformation with well-placed legs for excellent walking ability. Ewes must be feminine tending to be polled and rams must be masculine also tending to be polled. The Meatmaster breed can have any colour or a combination of colours with good skin pigmentation. The covering must consist of short, shiny hair with an underlying blanket of fluffy fine wool. The breed must never be shorn thus natural shedding ability of the coat is essential. The tail should be well attached and preferably not longer than the hock. It should be a neat wedge-shape or uniformly thin tail, with only a moderate covering of fat.



Photo: Meatmastersa.co.za

### Production norms

Age at first lambing = 14 months

Number of lambs born per 100 ewes lambing = 115

Number of lambs weaned per 100 ewes lambing = 110

Meatmaster lambs slaughtered at 5 months of age at 38 kg will yield a market acceptable carcass of 17.5 kg.

### Meatmaster weights

Trait	Average
Birth weight (kg)	3.4
100-day weaning weight (kg)	27.0
270-day weight (kg)	47.0
Mature ewe weight (kg)	52.0
Ram weight (kg)	65.0

### Products

- Meat - The carcass is not regarded as a fat-tailed type and is acceptable in the market. Lambs are marketed from their mothers as early as three months of age.



Photo: Meatmastersa.co.za

### Normal production environment

Meatmaster sheep are found mainly in the central and western extensive sheep breeding areas of South Africa.

### Breed numbers

Currently the breed society has 99 members, with about 40 000 stud ewes among them. The total number of Meatmaster 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:

Peters, F.W., 2011. Meatmaster sheep breed establishment in South Africa. Kejafa Knowledge Works  
[www.meatmastersa.co.za](http://www.meatmastersa.co.za)