



South African sheep breeds: Persian sheep

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

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

Recommended citation: Snyman, M.A., 2014. South African sheep breeds : Persian sheep. Info-pack ref. 2014/026. Grootfontein Agricultural Development Institute.

Type

Indigenous fat-rumped meat breed.



Photo: Members.bordernet.com.au

Origin of the breed

Of Somalian/Saudi-Arabian origin, the ancestors of the Blackhead Persian were initially introduced to South Africa by chance in 1869. A vessel damaged by a storm at sea carried a number of slaughter sheep. These sheep, one ram and three ewes, were taken to Wellington where the breed was further developed. Somali traders along the eastern coast may have introduced more animals. The Cape group had black heads but produced some progeny with red heads.

In 1930, The Persian (Blackhead) Sheep Breeders' Society of South Africa was formed, with headquarters in Cape Town. In 1948, the present Blackhead Persian Sheep Breeders' Society of South Africa was formed in De Aar.

Description

A small, smooth-haired fat rumped sheep with three distinct varieties:

- Blackhead Persian
- Redhead Persian
- Speckled (Skilder) Persian.

The Speckled Persians can be black or brown with white spots covering the body. The coat colour is basically white with a second colour usually light to dark brown super-imposed. Some are roan owing to an admixture of bright brown hair. The speckled colour of the Persian seems to be the result of a recessive colour of fat-rumped sheep. Some South African breeders have proved that by mating a Blackhead Persian or a Redhead Persian ram to white Van Rooy or Ronderib ewes, red speckled lambs can be bred. They have long, goat-like ears and both sexes are polled.



Photo: Tino Herselman

Production norms

Persian weights

Trait	Rams	Ewes
Birth weight (kg)	2.6	2.55
150-day weight (kg)	22	19
Mature weight (kg)	68	52



Photo: Persiansheep.com

Products

- Meat – Persian lambs reach maturity at an early age and thus also put on fat early. It yields a light carcass that is often downgraded due to fatness.
- Fat tail - The fat tail is used in venison products and processed meats.
- Skins – Tanned skins are of superior quality. The skin of the Blackhead Persian is remarkably thin and tough and is thus suitable for the manufacturing of leather gloves - known as Cape glover.

Role in breed development

The Blackhead Persian is one of the parent breeds of the well-known Dorper. It also played a role in upgrading of the Karakul.

Normal production environment

- Arid semi desert to savannah bushveld and coastal spekboom veld.
- The majority of the Blackhead and the Redhead Persians are farmed with in the Northern Cape Province, while the Speckled Persians could be found throughout the three Cape Provinces.



Photo: Farmersweekly.co.za

Breed numbers

The breeders' society currently has 48 members, which have a total of ± 20 000 Persian sheep among them. These are divided as follows:

- Blackhead Persian – 90%
- Redhead Persian – 4%
- Speckled Persian – 6%.

The total number of Persian sheep in South Africa is unknown.



Photo: Persiansheep.com

References

This info-pack was compiled from various sources of information.