



South African sheep breeds: SA Mutton Merino

SCOPE: This Info-pack provides a brief description of the SA Mutton Merino sheep breed.

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

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Type

Locally developed dual purpose meat and white wool breed.



Photo: SA Mutton Merino Breeders' Society

The German Merino became the first breed of sheep that affiliated with the book of pedigree in 1951 and started with a registration record for its animals. At that time there were 19 members with 500 registered animals.

Although not a true land race, the SA Mutton Merino was developed through selection for better wool quality and conformation. The uniqueness of the South African breed was recognised in 1971 when the breed name was changed to the SA Mutton Merino.

Photo: SA Mutton Merino Breeders' Society

Description

It is a large framed breed with a fleece of pure white wool, free of kemp and coloured fibres. Rams and ewes are polled. The breed produces good quality wool with an average fibre diameter of 21 to 23 micron. Ewes produce an average of 3.4 kg and rams 4.5 kg wool.



Photo: SA Mutton Merino Breeders' Society

Origin of the breed

Originally known as the German Mutton Merino, the first sheep were imported from Germany in 1932 by the South African Department of Agriculture for a breeding program at Elsenburg. A sheep was needed specifically for the winter rainfall areas, which could utilise the winter grazing, lamb in autumn and reared the lambs quickly so that they could be marketed before the grazing deteriorated in the dry summer months. Crosses with Merino ewes yielded lambs with good carcass qualities. By 1946 there was a number of private breeders and under the leadership of P.J. van Rensburg a German Merino meat sheep breeders association was founded on 30 October 1946. Van Rensburg can be referred to as the father of the SA meat Merino.

Production norms

Elsenburg Mutton Merino flock

Trait	Average
12-month weight (kg)	51
12-month fleece weight (kg)	3.3
12-month fibre diameter (μm)	23.0

Age at first lambing: 22 months

SA Mutton Merino weights

Trait	Rams	Ewes
Birth weight (kg)	4.1	3.8
100-day weight (kg)	32	29
Mature weight (kg)	125	70



Photo: SA Mutton Merino Breeders' Society

Products

- Meat – Puts on fat at a later age and can be slaughtered at a heavier live weight. Fat distribution is even over the carcass. Lamb carcasses of 27 kg are still classed as A2 or A3.
- Wool – Medium to strong white wool, which is over crimped.
- Crossbred lambs - Used as sire line for cross breeding. Produce heavy crossbred lambs on Merino ewes.

Role in breed development

The SA Mutton Merino contributed to the development of the following local breeds:

- Afrino
- Dohne Merino
- Dormer
- Vandoor.



Photo: SA Mutton Merino Breeders' Society

Normal production environment

- Semi-arid regions up to high rainfall sour grass veld areas.
- The majority of the SA Mutton Merino producers are found in the Free State, followed by the Western Cape Province, Mpumalanga and North-West province.

Breed numbers

The breed society currently has 174 members. The total number of SA Mutton Merino sheep in South Africa is unknown.

References

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

www.savleismerino.net