# South African sheep breeds: Van Rooy

**SCOPE:** This Info-pack provides a brief description of the Van Rooy sheep breed.
**KEY WORDS:** Type, Origin, Description, Production, Products, Distribution, Numbers.

## Type
Locally developed composite fat-rumped meat breed.


Photo: Van Rooy Breeders' Society

## Origin of the breed
In 1906, Senator J.C. van Rooy, of the farm Koppieskraal in the Bethulie district started his experiments to propagate a breed of sheep for slaughter lamb production: The requirements he set for this breed, were threefold:

- The breed had to be strong and hardy to cope with regular droughts
- It had to be fertile in order to maintain a high percentage of production
- It had to have an excellent conformation.

With these aims in mind he made use of a white "Blinkhaar Afrikaner" ram and eighty Rambouillet ewes. With the progeny of these the principle of inbreeding, coupled with severe selection, was applied. This selection was aimed mainly at size, conformation and white sheep with enough wool in between the bristly hair to serve as protection against cold. Senator Van Rooy realised that he could not dispose of fat localisation without sacrificing hardiness and fertility. Later on a polled Wensleydale ram was introduced in an effort to improve conformation. All-important characteristics have been preserved and present day breeding and selection keep them in mind.

## Description
The Van Rooy is a medium to large framed sheep and both rams and ewes are polled. The tail is characteristically fat-rumped. They have a characteristic dewlap from the jaw to the brisket and a very prominent chest and brisket. The Van Rooy sheep is covered with strong white calcereous hair. The upper part of the body must have a woolly mixture of hair. On the head, legs and lower parts of the body the hair should be short and devoid of wool.
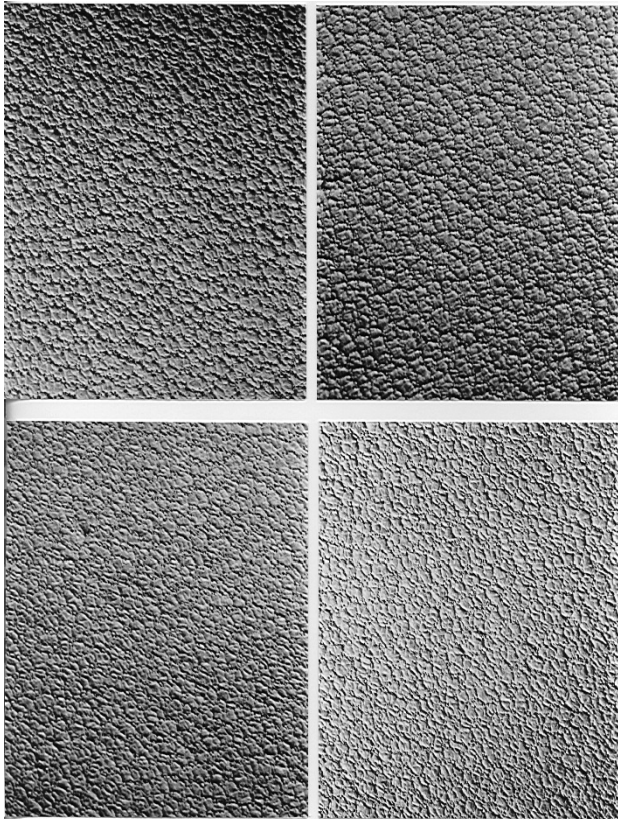

Photo: Indigenousbreeds.co.za

The tail consists of two parts, namely the main upper part and the switch. The main portion should be broad and firm, and affixed as high as possible. It is oval towards the rear with a slight upward tilt at the end from which the switch hangs down vertically. The switch should be smooth with short hair and no wool. The size of the tail should be well in proportion with the rest of the sheep.

## Production norms

Van Rooy ewes can be mated throughout the year and are ideally suited for accelerated lambing systems.

## Products

- Meat - With the Van Rooy sheep attempts are made to breed a sheep with as little fat localization on the carcass as possible, except on the rump and in the tail.
- Skins – The skin makes good glove leather.
- Van Rooy rams are widely used to produce cross-bred lambs, which put on fat on the carcass at a much earlier stage than when cross breeding two non-fat-tailed breeds.



Grain pattern of different Van Rooy skins

## Normal production environment

- Arid to semi-arid savannah.
- Van Rooy sheep are farmed with throughout South Africa.
- Commercial flocks in Gauteng are found in the North and North-Western areas, especially the Bushveld part. In the Free State, most of the Van Rooy breeders are found in the South and South-Western parts of the province. Van Rooy sheep are also found in the Northern Cape in the areas north of the Orange River and the districts next to the Orange River.



Photo: Bib.ge

## Breed numbers

The Van Rooy Sheep Breeders' Association currently has 86 members. The total number of Van Rooy 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:

Ramsay, K., Harris, L. & Kotzé, A., 2001. Landrace breeds: South Africa's indigenous and locally developed farm animals. Farm animal conservation trust, Pretoria.

www.studbook.co.za/Society/vanrooy/sheep.html