



Ad hoc “Merino network”:

Merino and Merino-derived breeds in Europe

State of art – *in situ* valorization.

MERINO BREEDING IN HUNGARY

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Monday 15th February 2021 13.50 (CET) - *First session: the Merino and Merino-derived breeds in Europe: history, demography, and genetics*



History

Merino sheep have been kept in Hungary since the middle of the 1700s. By the mid-19th century, the number of these animals approached **10 million**. In that period, breeding was aimed at the production of fine wool obtained from the Electoral-Negretti form of Merino sheep.

By the end of the 19th century sheep stocks declined in Hungary, while masses of wool were produced in areas under the English crown (Australia, New-Zealand). The predecessor of modern Hungarian Merino sheep, so called Hungarian Combing Merino, emerged from crossbreeding between the Electoral-Negretti Merino and local breeds (Racka, long-woolled German-Swabian sheep) by the 1920-1930s. This mixture was subsequently upgraded using Rambouillet and German mutton breeds, in order to increase the staple length, and obtain medium fine (23-25 micron), easy to comb wool. The stock of some 400,000 sheep that survived the war, was increased to 3 million animals in 20 years. As a result of this forced distribution, the traditional Racka, Tsigai and Cikta breeds barely escaped extinction. The heterogeneity of Hungarian Combing Merino was further increased by upgrading with Soviet Merino breeds which represented different types. These breeds were **Caucasian, Stavropol, Grozni**, and most of all **Askanian Merinos**.

From the 1960s onwards, meat purpose breeding also got underway, first with **Merino Precoce** from France, then with **German** (at the time both GDR and BRD) **Mutton Merino** breeds.

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History

During the 1970-1980s the Hungarian Combing Merino was additionally crossed with the long-wool **Kent** and **Corriedale** breeds, as well as with **Australian Merino** aimed at improving wool quality and with **Booroola Merino** to increase reproduction rates. These developments explain, why Merino stocks in Hungary, display a broad range of different types.

The change of regim (1989) involved a new situation and a general crisis in the agriculture, effecting the sheep husbandry, too. The headcount dropped under 750 thousand sheep by 1995.

In 1991 was established Our Association with the participation of 55 sheepbreeders. The main task of the new organization was to reorganize the breeding work, to save the herds and their breeding documents.

The breeding method becomes pure breeding (after the cross-breeding wave of the previous decades) and a new herdbook for Hungarian Merino was established in 1993. Following the introduction of the Animal Breeding Law, offspring from crossings with another breed (even if it is one of the closest Merino sub-breeds) can be re-entered into the main part of the herdbook ("A" category) only after four generations.

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Current situation

In the case of Merinos the income derived in 96% from meat production. That is why the breeding aim is improving the reproduction characteristics, the lambing traits and the meat forms. In wool production the quality has priority. A mean fibre thickness of 16-26 micron, as well as combing quality length are basic requirements.

The advantage of this breed is that it can be mated any time of the year so that lamb production may be timed for the three major purchasing periods (Easter, Feragosto, Christmas). This opens up tremendous opportunities which may be exploited in maintaining our markets.

Unfortunately the number of the registered Hungarian Merinos appreciably decreased in the last 50 years.

	1970	1980	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
number of registered ewes	65 214	112 187	63 951	25 551	29 862	10 832	5 406	4 467
number of breeders	92	85	38	47	84	57	41	41

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Current situation

The mean parameters of registered Hungarian Merino sheep in 2019:

	Rams	Ewes
Average daily gain before weaning, g	417	365
Body weight at 1 year, kg	72.3	51.8
Fibre thickness on shoulder, micron	22.7	22.8
Staple length, cm	10.8	9.3
Fleece weight, kg	6.6	4.8
number of sheep	809	8167

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Current situation



Hungarian Merino ram



Hungarian Merino ewe

Beside the Hungarian Merino two German Merino breeds are bred in Hungary: the German Mutton Merino (2000 ewes) and the Merino Landschaf (700 ewes).

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Food and non-food products and services

Meat: almost all lambs are for (live lamb) export to Italy (~80%) and to Turkey, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, France, etc.
(70% light 30% heavy lamb)
Two slaughter Houses export lamb meat (Japan, Switzerland, Austria, Germany)

Wool: greasy wool export, no Hungarian wool industry, no woolscour

Milk: ~ 700.000 liter processed by the breeders and Hungarian manufacturers to Hungarian market

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Thank you for your attention!

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