

First European Wool Conference

Sheep breeding and quality wool production

Mérida (Extremadura)
Spain
14–17 October 1999

The wool sector, an element of rural diversification

Sheep breeding plays an important socio-economic role throughout the European Union, especially in mountain and marginal areas facing decline and rural exodus.

Wool is one of Europe's oldest resources and was once the most important source of wealth of certain countries. However, the extremely low prices paid for wool and the almost total lack of efficient collection, grading and marketing structures in most EU member states have resulted in this natural resource being severely neglected. Prices often barely cover the cost of shearing and there is no incitement to sheep farmers to increase quality.

The upgrading of the different kinds of European wool would contribute towards the sustainable development of the rural zones concerned, firstly through the increase in farmers' income and secondly through the creation of jobs in local collection and processing structures. In addition, there is a growing demand by consumers for quality products with a guaranteed origin.

The European Wool Group

On 22 May 1997 representatives of major professional organisations involved in the producing and processing of European wool presented the newly founded European Wool Group (EWG) in Brussels.

The EWG's main aims are to improve the value of European produced wool and represent members' needs to the European Union and other institutions.

- Agenzia Lane d'Italia (Italia/Italie/Italy)
- Asociacion Nacional de Criadores de Ganado Merino (España/Espagne/Spain)
- Association Textile Européenne de Liaison, d'Innovation, d'Echange et de Recherche (ATELIER)
- British Wool Marketing Board (Gran Bretaña/Royaume-Uni/United Kingdom)
- Federação das Associações Portuguesas de Ovinicultores (Portugal)
- Gordet Oy (Finlandia/Finlande/Finland)
- Kooperativet Norsk Kjøtt (Noruega/Norvège/Norway)
- Maaseutukeskuten LIITTO - Finnish Sheep Breeders' Association (Finlandia/Finlande/Finland)
- Schweizerische Inlandwollzentrale (Suiza/Suisse/Switzerland)
- Sveriges Ull & Skinnrad (Suecia/Suède/Sweden)

« Agenda 2000 - Agriculture »

In its document "Agenda 2000 - Agriculture", the European Commission has formulated practical proposals on how European policy on agriculture and rural development should be adapted to the needs of the next century. Among its main objectives are:

- rural diversification and the production of renewable raw materials for non-food purposes;
- the creation of jobs in rural zones, especially for young people and women;
- greater respect for the demands of consumers for products with a guaranteed origin and quality;
- integration into the world market and the introduction of environmental and social norms on an international level;
- strengthening economic cohesion within the EU and expansion to central and eastern Europe.

It is within this framework that the European Wool Group (EWG) is organising a series of two colloquies to examine the possible beneficial effects of a revival of the wool sector in Europe and ways in which this could be achieved. The conference in Mérida is the first of this series.

Extremadura, the cradle of the Merino sheep breed

The Merino breed was developed in Spain during the course of the Middle Ages.

In the XIIIth century sheep breeding was one of the principal economic pillars of the Christian kingdoms of the Iberian peninsula. By the end of the XIIIth century there was a well-organised system of transhumance. Flocks of fine wool sheep covered long distances along special paths called *las Cañadas* from the mountainous regions in the north to the lower areas in the south.

The main objective of sheep breeding was the production of wool. Already in the Middle Ages the quantity of wool produced in Castilla was higher than the local processing capacity and a large proportion of the wool was exported abroad.

The breeding of Merino sheep remained a Spanish monopoly for several centuries. It was only at the end of the XVIIIth century that Merino sheep were first exported to the rest of Europe and then to countries of the southern hemisphere.

Program

Thursday, 14 October

9.00 Arrival and reception, distribution of conference documents

Opening session :

- 10.00 Introduction and welcome
D. Juan Esquinas, President of the Lonja Agropecuaria de Extremadur; Carlo Piacenza, Agenzia Lane d'Italia, President of the European Wool Group; a representative of the Ministry of Agriculture of Extremadur; a representative of the Ministry of Agriculture of Spain
- 10.50 Wool, a lively heritage, *Elisa Calado Pinheiro, Textile Museum, Portugal*
- 11.10 European wool on the world market, *Carlo Piacenza, Italy*
- 11.40 Initial overview of the present situation of the European wool sector based on the questionnaire sent out by the European Wool Group, *EWG secretariat*
- 12.00 Presentation of the general objectives of Agenda 2000 – Agriculture, *a representative of the European Commission*
- 12.30 Press conference - Inauguration of the exhibition on "European wool diversity"
- 14.30 – 16.30 Lunch

Rural diversification and the production of renewable raw materials for non-food purposes

- Chaired by Markus Schneeberger, Swiss Wool Board
- 16.30 The situation of the wool sector in Spain, *José Ambrona Gragera, Asociacion Nacional de Criadores de Ganado Merino, Vice-President of the European Wool Group*
- 17.00 Production, collection and marketing of wool in Finland, *E Hautakangas, Finnish Sheep Breeders Association*
- 17.30 Wool in Great Britain, promotion of quality production by the British Wool Marketing Board, *Malcolm Brook, wool expert of the BWMB*
- 18.00 – 18.30 Coffee break
- 18.30 Sheep breeding and innovative wool processing in Austria, *H. Seittinger, Styria Sheep Breeders Ass.*
- 19.00 Sheep breeding in Slovakia, today and tomorrow, *Djarmila Dubravska, Nitra Univ. of Agronomy*
- 19.30 Sheep breeds in Italy, proposals for improved use of wool, *Dr. Leo Gallico, Agenzia Lane d'Italia*
- 20.00 A study on wool production, sheep breeding and the potential of adding value to local wool in south west Ireland, *Sean Moriarty, Dingle wool cooperative*
- 20.30 End of the session
- 21.00 Dinner of welcome

Friday, 15 October

Session 1 : Developing products with a guaranteed origin and quality

Chaired by Sissel Berntsen, Fagsenteret for Kjøtt, Norway

- 10.00 Recording scheme and breeding programme for wool traits in Finnsheep, *Marja-Leena Puntila, Agricultural Research Centre of Finland*
- 10.15 Wool certification for International Markets, *William Ainsworth, General Manager, SGS Wool Testing Services, GB*
- 10.30 Characterisation of fibres and standardisation, *Christian des Touches, wool expert, France*
- 10.45 Genetic variation in wool traits and wool classification in Iceland, *Emma Eythorsdottir, Agricultural Research Institute, Reykjavik*
- 11.00 Impact of the wool crisis on the selection of Merino sheep breeds, *Joseph Rémillon, president of UPRA Est à laine mérinos, France*
- 11.15 Discussion
- 12.00 – 12.30 Aperitif

Session 2 : Wool shearing and collection

Chaired by Irma Boncamper, textile engineer, Finland

- 12.30 Shearing training courses in Norway, *Sissel Berntsen, Fagsenteret for Kjøtt*
- 12.45 Organisation of shearing and wool collection in Portugal, *Tiago Garcia Perloiro, FAPOC, Portugal*
- 13.00 Wool collection and shearing training courses in Great Britain, *Malcolm Brook, wool expert*
- 13.15 An association of shearers, ATM, and its training courses, *Klaus Kiefer, France*
- 13.30 Discussion
- 14.30 – 16.30 Lunch

Session 3 : Marketing of wool

Chaired by José Ambrona Gragera, Asociacion Nacional de Criadores de Ganado Merino

- 16.30 The Swiss Wool Board, the abandonment of state grants, alternatives, *Markus Schneeberger, Director of the Swiss Wool Board*
- 16.45 Providing the highest possible price for producers - the Bradford wool auctions, *Alun Evans, Chairman, British Wool Marketing Board*
- 17.00 An experience of processing wool of the Sambucana and Biellese sheep breeds, *C. Piacenza, , Italy*
- 17.15 Technical aspects in industrial processing of European wool, *Daniel Palet, Corcoy SA, Spain*
- 17.30 The problem of eliminating pesticides in wool, *William Ainsworth, SGS Wool Testing Services, GB*
- 17.45 Environmental impact on wool production. Experiences from Australia, *M. Kristensson, journalist, Sweden*
- 18.00 Discussion
- 18.30 – 19.00 Coffee break

Session 4 : Training and information

Chaired by João Madeira, FAPOC, Portugal

- 19.00 Quality promotion programme for sheep breeders in Finland, *Minna Sippola, Rural Advisory Centre*
- 19.15 Giving feedback to Swedish sheep farmers with the aim of increasing the quality, *Kia Gabriellsson, sheep & wool adviser*
- 19.30 Wool production and quality improvement in Germany, *Stefan Völl, Director of the Federation of German Sheep Breeders' Associations*
- 19.45 Training programme for graders and wool experts in Portugal, *José Chabert, wool expert, Ministry of Rural Development*

- 20.00 Putting rustic wool sorts to maximum use, *P. Hoelfeldt Lund, Norsk Kunstvevgarn, Norway*
20.15 Discussion
21.00 End of the session

Saturday, 16 October

Strengthening economic cohesion and coordination within Europe

Chaired by Eva Berglund, Wool & Skin Council, Sweden

- 10.00 Establishment of European cooperation, *Malcolm Brook, British Wool Marketing Board*
10.15 Construction of a wool scouring plant in Austria, in cooperation with partners in Switzerland and Germany, *Johannes Regensburger, Oetzal, Austria*
10.30 Cross-border cooperation between Austria and Slovenia, *M. Primoc Krišelj, Association Brillenschaf, Slovenia*
10.45 European scientific cooperation in the fine wool sector, *Margret Merchant, European Fine Fibres Network, UK*
11.00 The possible involvement of the LEADER programme, *a representative of a LEADER project*
11.15 European cooperation between sheepbreeders and small enterprises, *A.T.E.L.I.E.R.*
11.30 Discussion
12.00 – 12.30 Aperitif

Saturday, 16 October

A strategy for the wool sector in Europe

Chaired by Carlo Piacenza

- 12.30 European Parliament report on the « need for support measures for producers and processors of European wool », *Liam Hyland, MEP, Ireland*
12.50 European Parliament Report on « quality policy for agricultural products and agri-foodstuffs », *Jan Mulder, MEP, Netherlands*
13.10 The potential relevance of the wool sector to the general objectives of Agenda 2000, *a representative of the European Commission*
13.30 Discussion
14.30 – 16.30 Lunch
16.30 Presentation of the results of the two previous days' discussions:
17.30 Proposals for a strategy for the wool sector, *A.T.E.L.I.E.R.*
18.00 Discussion
19.00 End of the session, *Alberto Oliart, President of the Merino Sheep Breeders Association*

Sunday, 17 October

- Visit of a sheep farm
Visit of Mérida

General information

Registration and payment

Registration fee : 100 euros

The fee includes :

- the program
- the congress documents
- the coffee breaks
- the three lunches
- the dinner on Thursday 14th

Official languages

Simultaneous interpretation into Spanish, French, English and German will be available .
Documents will be in three languages: Spanish, French and English.

For all information

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