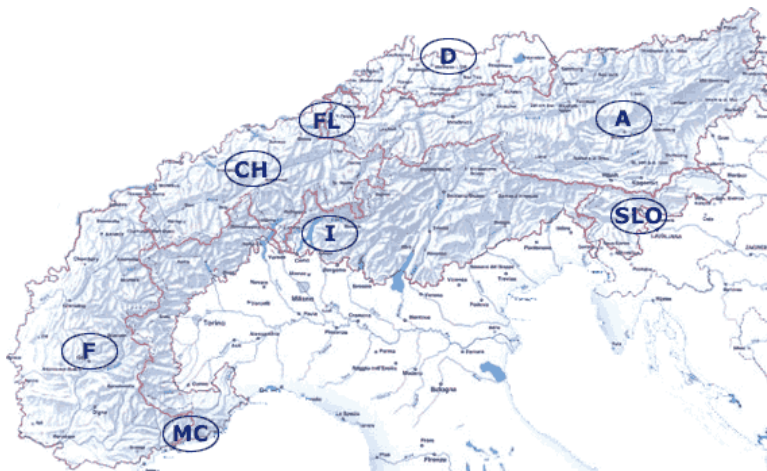


Examples of successful commercialization of sheep and goat products in Alpine regions

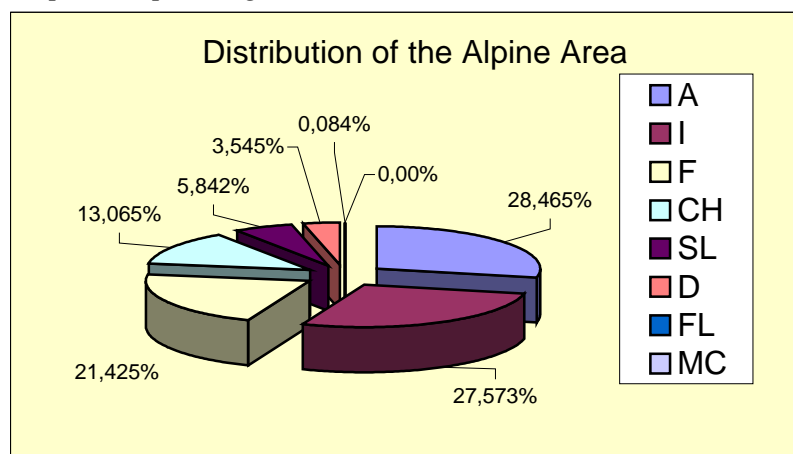
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Introduction

The region of the Alps includes 8 nations and covers a surface of about 191.000 km² and has more than 13 million inhabitants. It is an important living, recreational and economic region. Austria, Italy, France and Switzerland have the largest portion of this important area (see graph 2).



Graph 1: Alpine regions



Graph 2: Distribution of Alpine area

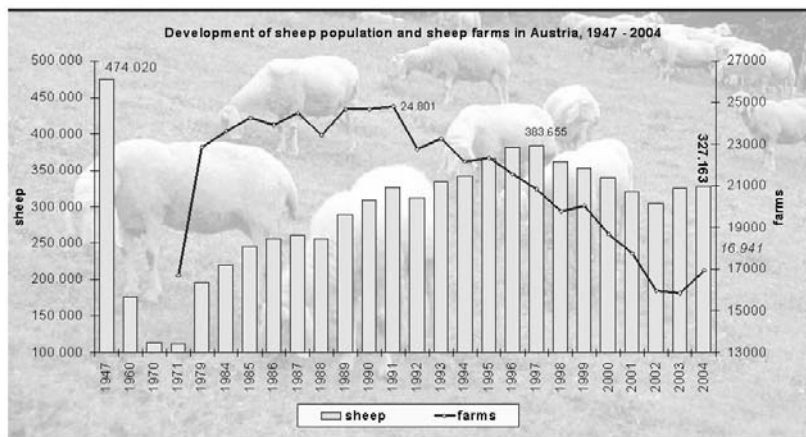
The most valuable property of this area is its unique landscape, the fresh air and the high quality drinking water. The aim of agriculture is not only to produce food, the aim also must be to preserve this rural landscape.

Sheep and goat keeping significantly contribute to the preservation and sustainable development of this unique area. Many steep grassland areas can be used only by sheep or goats. Generally, the area of grassland reduced about 21% in the time from 1999 to 2003 in

Austria. 76% of this reduction is in alpine areas. This is not only a problem in Austria, the situation is similar in the other countries in the Alps.

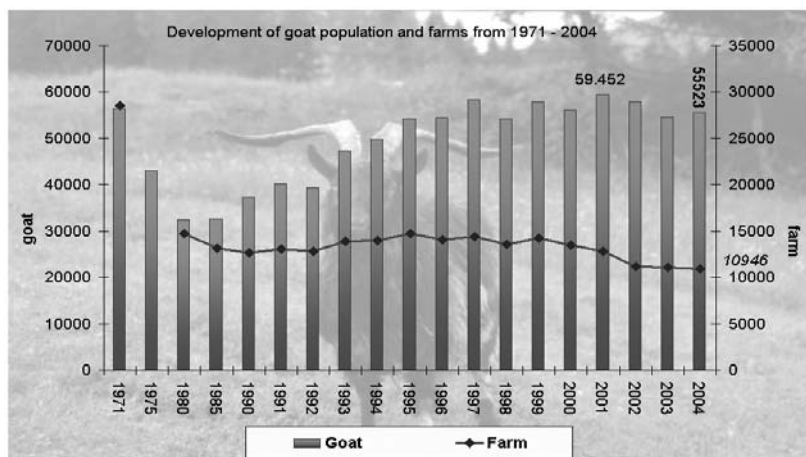
Sheep and goat production in Austria

As a Representative of the nations of the Alps, I present to you statistics in Austria. In Austria the sheep population is about 330.000. The number of sheep farms is 17.000. After a period of decreasing from 1997 to 2002, the number of sheep and farms is now increasing. The average flock size is 19.3 sheep. Most sheep are kept for meat production. About 20.000 sheep are used for milk production. The reason for this increase of sheep and farms is: first, the products have become more and more popular, and second, sheep keeping does not need such high investments and working hours are more flexible compared with dairy milk production.



Graph 3: Number of sheep and farms in Austria

Goat population is still smaller than sheep population. 60.000 goats are kept on 11.000 farms. So the average flock size is 5.1 goats. In the last 10 years, as you can see in graph 4, though population is more or less the same, the number of farms is gradually decreasing. Goats are mainly kept for milk production, but also meat production is increasing.



Graph 4: Number of goats and farms in Austria

Production systems

In most cases, the sheep and goats are kept on pasture half of the year and the other half, (in winter), they are in a stable. In the time between middle of June to middle of September many sheep and goats graze on pastures in the Alps. These pastures are characterized by their very diverse vegetation, especially herbs. The pastures go up to 3000 m above sea level. If ewes go together with their lambs (born in spring) to the pastures in the Alps, it is not possible to sell

lambs in this time. In autumn, when the ewes and the lambs come back from the Alps, there is a surplus of lambs. This is not an optimal system, but most farmers don't want to have sheep at home in this period.

For the long wintertime conserves of hay or silage must be prepared. To make hay or silage in alpine regions is very expensive and almost hard work.

Because of the small farms, the production conditions also vary considerably. This causes variable quality of products and high production costs, especially in lamb meat production. For the commercialisation of large amounts of lamb, the quality differences are a disadvantage.

One example of solution is a central collecting point. In Styria for example, a local sheep-keeping association built a stable for about 400 lambs. The members of the association bring their lambs with a body weight of 25 to 35 kg and in the stable the lambs are fed with concentrate and hay or straw until a final body weight of 40 to 45 kg is reached. One advantage is that the quality of lambs is better and the customer can choose the lambs from a large flock. Another advantage is that it is easier for the farmer and the association to sell the lambs and it is easier for the customer because there is only one place for loading the lambs on a lorry.

Another possibility is to group several small farms into local production and commercialisation associations. The farmers produce according to defined instructions, resulting in better and standardized quality of products and better opportunities for selling. For lamb production these instructions are to use a performance tested ram, to remove the lambs from the mothers with an age of about 8 weeks and to feed the lambs with concentrate and hay or straw for free intake. For milk production in Bregenzer Wald for example, the farmers are not allowed to produce grass silage for feeding. In winter the sheep get only hay and cereals. No grass silage results in better quality cheese products.

Marketing strategies

Economic sheep and goat production is only possible, if the products that are produced can be sold on the market with an economic price. Under the hard and difficult production conditions in the Alps with small farms, the production costs are higher than in other countries, like Great Britain or Australia. If the costs for production are high, the price for the products must be also high. And this is the second problem.

If there are two pieces of lamb meat in the showcase in a supermarket, one from New Zealand with a price of 3 €/per kg e.g. and one from Austria with a price of 6 €/per kg the consumer will buy the cheaper one.

* One strategy is to connect the name of the product with the name of the village or region in which it is produced. The consumer perhaps prefers the product of their own region or buys a product of a region where he/she spends their holidays. Remembrance of a nice holiday can be the reason to buy a product. But in the first place, quality is the most important marketing strategy. Quality is the best publicity.

* Another strategy to get a high price for the products is to sell it directly by the producer on the own farm or on a special typical farmer market. The consumer can see how the sheep or goats are kept, they can see what feed the animals get. They also get information about the animals and their environment. But this is a very work intensive way and also the regulations are very strict, especially the regulations of hygiene.

* School at the farm. To educate awareness about agriculture and animal keeping the children and their teacher spend one day or one week on a farm and learn about work on a farm. They also learn the connection between agriculture and environment. They get a real picture about agriculture. On a sheep farm the children can learn and see how to feed a sheep, how the sheep are kept, they can learn something about the wool and they can see what products can be created from wool. The children can create their own talisman from wool. The aim of this

way of teaching is to learn the natural rotations and their connections, to see the way of food from the stable or from the field to the table, to educate awareness for local rural products and get information about small structured farming and their importance in rural areas.

Some Examples

Meat

In order to market local lamb or goat meat in most cases the name of the products include the name of the region where it is produced, e.g., Ennstaler Quality Lamb, Kärntner Lamb, Tiroler Alp Lamb, Salzburger Mountain Lamb, Tauernlamm, Steirisches Kid Meat.....

With the name of the product, the consumer connects, for example, remembrance of a holiday. He/she knows, where the product is coming from and how it is produced and will buy it.

Wool

Wool from different breeds and many different small flocks varies in quality and therefore most of the wool is used for insulation purposes. Insulation of the house with biological material is a growing market.

The “Sölker Naturpark Janker” is an example for making a typical article of apparel. The wool from the sheep of the nature park with the name “Sölktaler Naturpark” is used to make this typical product. From shearing the sheep, washing the wool, preparing the fibre and making the cloth, all is done in this region.

Milk

The most diverse products are made from sheep and goat milk. The milk of the small ruminants from the alpine region is internationally very in demand. The milk is produced in a region, where air and the environment are still clean. In Austria there are only 3 dairies where the sheep and goat farmers can take the milk. Many enterprises convert the milk to different cheese and yoghurt and sell the products directly to the consumers.

Summary

A successful marketing of products of sheep and goat production is only possible if people enjoy consciously and know connections between agriculture, nutrition and health, know the value of food and decide for fresh, regional and seasonal products. Only the linkage of culture and enjoyment make our food "food".

“The culinary inheritance of Austria is an indispensable component of our identity. The variety at high-quality regional specialities, which are manufactured in our country, is enormous. It is however important, the numerous producer and processing plants, which contribute with their work also substantially to the preservation of our culture landscape to promote and announce”, says the Austrian minister of agriculture. The quality of the product in connection with the name of the region is a very good marketing strategy and can contribute to promote the small ruminants.

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