

Development of a sustainable conservation programme for the mountainous sheep breed of Katsika in Greece

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Current status and trends

The Katsika breed is an indigenous sheep breed raised in the mountain and semi - mountain regions of Ioannina and Thesprotia in Epirus. Today the remaining population is about 1880 heads in 7 flocks, which is supported under the conservation measures for endangered breeds. The programme is applied by the Farmers Association under the supervision of the Genetic Improvement Centre of Ioannina of the Ministry of Rural Development and Food.

Farming System

The farming system is extensive, based on grazing. In the majority of the flocks transhumance is practiced, with traditional installations in the mountains. The average flock size is over the 300 heads and the average milk production range between 100-150 kg, which is higher than other mountain breeds.

The management system is divided into 3 periods:

1. December to February, the animals are stabled and fed with forages and cut grass
2. March to May, the animals graze in pastures at small distances from the stable. In this period, feeding is based mainly in grazing.
3. May to the end of October, the animals move to the mountain pastures, in altitude higher than 1200 m. Feeding is exclusively based on grazing. The farmers divide the whole pasture land in partitions, where they guide their flocks for grazing.



Future Perspectives

The main concerns with the development of the breed are related with social and economical aspects and the lack of necessary infrastructures for marketing and promotion of the products.

Until today, although the breed's products, both milk and lamb, are characterized as high quality products, which are recognized by the consumers, there is no application of a certification system of a quality label under which these products will be distributed into the market.



The objective of the programme is to develop a network that will include all the involved bodies and the local industry in order to have a separated production chain for breed products that will differentiate these from the mass production.

Breeding programme

The breeding programme of the Katsika breed aims to production and functional traits and also to the maintenance of genetic diversity (avoid inbreeding).

The target is to consider all the traits that define the quality and typicality of the products, together with the maintenance of the characteristics of the breed that are connected with low production cost, the adaptation to the specific region and the environmental and cultural value of the production system.

Conservation activities

The breeders are supported under the agro environmental measures, for the conservation of genetic resources. Furthermore, semen is collected and stored for conservation purposes. The work is on going.

The Katsika breed, due to its adaptation in the specific environment and its production system, could be a successful model for the development of a sustainable breeding program that will aim to the recognition of the breed contribution to the environment, the diversification of the production and the products typicality.