

### Importance of local sheep breeds

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**Native breeds of sheep are very well adapted to local environmental conditions, undemanding in feed and highly resistant to adverse living conditions. The beneficial effect of native breeds on landscape architecture and conservation, especially in poor biotopes, enables their use as an alternative factor in environmental protection. As native primitive breeds of sheep, they contributed to the later noble regional types of sheep. Sheep also play an important role in rural tourism as a component of landscape and folk culture and supplier of many valuable products. To save local breeds from extinction and preserve valuable characteristics in the population, they were included in the sheep genetic resources conservation programme, while the national agri-environmental programme provides breeders with financial support.**

The multipurpose sheep known as Podhale Zackels accompanied man during the period when wild Carpathian areas were being settled, becoming a permanent feature of highlander economy and culture. Coloured Mountain Sheep were kept by mountaineers due to their coloured, dark wool and skins used to produce regional dresses and decorative elements. Polish Corriedale sheep are characterized by good milk yield. Kamieniecka sheep produce uniform thick wool of good quality. Coloured Merino sheep show good slaughter performance and provide untypical, coloured thin wool and skins used to produce natural utilitarian and ornamental products. Olkuska sheep are characterized by high prolificacy, good milk yield and strong maternal instinct. Pomeranian sheep are docile and not skittish, making good use of pastures and producing exceptionally flavoursome meat. Świniarka sheep yield wool that is useful for carpet and felt production as well as flavoursome meat, similar to venison in taste. Lowland sheep (Żelaźnieńska and Uhruska) give medium-thick wool of good quality and lambs with well-muscled carcasses. Wielkopolska sheep produce high-quality wool while showing good rate of growth and feed conversion when fattened. Wrzosówka sheep are fur-coat sheep giving skins of excellent quality. Wrzosówka meat has an exquisite taste resembling that of roe deer meat. Old-type Polish Merino is the precursor of the whole group of Merino sheep characterized by wool of excellent quality.