

SHEEP AND GOAT FARMING IN ICELAND – A SUMMARY OF THE SITUATION IN 2014

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Iceland, with a population of nearly 320.000, is more than self-sufficient in sheep products. Although the sheep sector has declined since the late 1970s its contribution to the total agricultural income is close to 23%, being second to cattle production. While the total number of winterfed sheep is 476.000 (Table 1) the total number of goats is only 850 and thus of little economic and social importance compared with the sheep. Only one breed is kept of both species, the Iceland breed of sheep and the Iceland breed of goats, both native breeds of ancient Nordic origin. While lamb is the main product, accounting for some 90% of the total farm income from sheep, both wool and skins are valuable by-product with a range of colours. The total sheep meat production in 2013 was 9.900 tons (Table 1) of which 2.800 tons of sheep meat and 1.800 tons of other slaughter products were exported to several countries as free-range, high quality commodities (Table 2). The domestic sheep meat consumption, mainly lamb, is 21 kg per capita and is increasing again after a substantial reduction over the last 35-40 years. There is a trend towards fewer and bigger sheep flocks, even up to 800-1200 head, and technical progress is evident. All sheep and goats in the country are individually recorded. Nearly 27 kg of meat are produced per ewe on the average and the mean numbers of lambs born per ewe are mainly in the range of 1.7 – 1.9 lambs per flock. Some 30.000 ewes are artificially inseminated with semen from 50 rams, ultrasonic scanning is carried out on large numbers of ram and ewe lambs and pregnancy scanning is widespread. The EUROP classification results show trends towards greater muscularity and less fat (Table 3) while the average carcass weight is fairly stable, being almost 16 kg in 2013. Organic sheep farming is developing slowly and one slaughterhouse has organic certification. Amongst novel enterprises are ewe and goat milk production and processing on a small scale.

Table 1. **Changes in sheep production in Iceland**

	1978	2013
Number of winterfed sheep	896.000	476.000
Sheep meat production	15.000 tons	9.900 tons
Sheep meat consumption per capita	47 kg	21 kg

Table 2. Exports of sheep meat and other sheep slaughter products from Iceland in 2013

Country	Tons
Hong Kong	1.368
Netherlands	663
UK	617
Norway	581
Faeroe Islands	349
Russia	318
USA	205
Japan	149
Ireland	134
Vietnam	93
China	73
Spain	42
Egypt	38
Denmark	23
Finland	22
Kazakstan	18
Sweden	7
Latvia	6
Canada	5
Greenland	3
Germany	1
Other countries	0.1
Total	Meat: 2.900 tons + other slaughter products: 1.800 tons = 4.700 tons

Table 3. Lamb classification in Iceland 2013

	EUROP classes (% of carcasses)			Fat classes (% of carcasses)	
	E	1.48		(0.99)	1
U	23.04	(16.50)	2	49.44	(39.75)
R	66.96	(58.04)	3	38.60	(41.06)
O	8.11	(23.26)	3+	7.80	(12.43)
P	0.40	(1.21)	4	1.00	(2.24)
			5	0.06	(0.06)

Average carcass weight = 15.99 kg of 532.453 lambs slaughtered during the main slaughter season 1 September – 31 October 2013.
2005 percentages shown in brackets