

AUTOCHTHONOUS SHEEP BREEDS IN SLOVENIA BOVSKA SHEEP

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Abstract

Slovenian autochthonous Bovksa sheep breed, its origin, name origin, breeding area, its characteristics and production traits are presented. Bovska sheep are found in the Soča valley but they are scarce so that a special preservation program has been accepted. Sheep are bred in small flocks of ten to twenty animals, sometimes forty or more. It is estimated that there are only between 1500 and 2000 animals of Bovska sheep breed left.

Key words: sheep, autochthon breed, Slovenia

The autochthonous sheep breeds in Slovenia

1. Bovska sheep

1.1. Name

The breed got its name after small town Bovec that lies in upper Soča valley i.e. in the North-West part of Slovenia near the Italian border. In Trenta valley this breed is also called "trentarka" or "pure trentarka" if it has typically short ears.

1.2. Origin and history of the breed

The Bovksa sheep breed originated in the white sheep which used to be spread in the Alps. Bleiweis (1871) mentioned Trbiska sheep breed and reported that sheep with shorter ears produced more milk. Pirč (quoted according to Zagožen, 1982) reported that Tolminksa and Bovska sheep breeds originated in the peat sheep while in the German literature it is stated that in some Alpine valleys and swampy parts.

Zaupelschafe was found which should have been the ancestor of modern breeds in this area. Sheep are bred in small flocks of ten to twenty animals, sometimes 40 or more. After the weaning sheep are milked in the mountain pasture where all milk is used for cheese production. Most of it is used at home but recently it has been sold in the mountain pastures. In most of the flocks some goats are kept that are grazed and milked together with sheep. Shepherd dogs are not used, only shepherds look after the flocks since no fenced pastures are known in the mountains but in the valleys, around

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the farms traditional wooden fences are used.

1.3. Population and breeding area

The Bovska sheep breed used to be reared in the wider area of Tolmin but after 1950 the number of sheep decreased quickly. Mountain pastures on which sheep and goats grazed have been abandoned. In some parts they grazed with cattle. In the Tolmin area about 20 mountain pastures for sheep existed. In the years between 1984 and 1994, only three mountain pastures for sheep remain and about 600 sheep graze there. But the number of sheep as well as of sheep breeders have been decreasing. Now sheep are kept only in the Trenta valley and in some smaller valleys like Koritnica and Lepena, i.e. upper Soča valley. It is estimated that only 1500 sheep of this breed still exist.

1.4. Utilization

The Bovska sheep breed is used for milk production. Ewes are at service once a year, in October and November, or even in December while lambing takes place from March to May. Lambs suck from 4 to 8 weeks, then they are sold for slaughter. They weigh from 10 to 18 kgs. After the weaning sheep are milked in the vicinity of the farms twice a day. In the first part of June sheep are taken to the mountain pastures. Mostly they graze on the common pastures above the forest border, where some buildings like stalls, milk pails, dairy houses and cottages for shepherds and milkers are situated. In the mountain pastures sheep are milked till the beginning of September. Before they return to the valley they are dried off. Sheep are shorn twice a year, in April and in November.

1.5. Breeders' organization

In the Tolmin region breeders have founded Cattle Breeding Association in which the Section for Small Ruminants takes part but the connection is very loose.

Breeders who take the small ruminants to the mountain pastures join the mountaineering community. They discuss the organization of work each year as well as the time of departure of sheep, which is usually on the first or second Sunday in June.

On the second or third day after the departure they measure the amount of produced milk in each breeder's flock. So the key for work in the mountain is settled as well as for the product sharing (cheese, curd).

1.6. Description

Ewes and rams do not have horns. An adult ewe weighs from 35 to 40 kgs and a ram from 45 to 50 kgs. Ewes lamb once a year and about 10 have twins. Ewes with twins are not selected for further breeding. Wool is gruff, fibres are 44 microns thick. They shear between 1.2 and 1.5 kg wool a year per a sheep. Wool is not used even for home production any more.

1.6.1. Colour

The Bovska sheep breed is primarily white, but some animals are black or brown. There are about 30 coloured ones.

1.6.2. Head

A head is small with a convex profile. The forehead is partly covered by wool.

1.6.3. Ears

It is typical for the sheep in Trenta valley that they have small ears, sometimes they resemble stumps and it is difficult to mark them. Such sheep is called "trentarka". In Bovec and in the vicinity sheep are weightier and have longer ears.

1.6.4. Tail

The Bokvsa sheep breed belongs to the Pramenka breed strain with gruff wool (Miti, 1987) and a short tail, which means that its ancestor was European moufflon. The tail is short and hairy.

1.6.5. Body

The Bokvsa sheep breed has small body, the belly is not covered by hair. The udder is well developed, teats are mostly too high and extra teats develop sometimes. Legs are short and thin, back legs are inclined forward so that animals are adapted for walking on steep meadows and paths. The height of withers ranges between 55 and 60 cm, the trunk is 60 to 65 cm long and the chest is 28 cm deep.

1.7. Performance

The Bovska sheep breed is extensively reared. During the winter animals are fed by small amounts of hay and branches of bushes so that they lose weight from December to April and twinning pregnancies often end in abortion. In some ewes in case of twinning pregnancy one of embryos dies and reabsorbs so that the ewe lambs only one lamb.

1.7.1. Wool

Wool is gruff. Sheep are shorn twice a year so that wool is tufted. Fibers are on average 44.33 micrometers thick, of assortments D and DE according to German classification scheme. About 1.5 kg wool is shorn a year per a sheep.

1.7.2. Milk

Milk is the main product of the Bovska sheep breed. After the weaning ewes are milked for 100 and 140 days. Ogrizek (1948) estimated the production at 65 to 80 kgs in the lactation. In the recent years the Selection Service controls the milkness in some flocks. The milkness of the Bovska sheep breed in controlled flocks is higher than on average since only better flocks are controlled. Table 1 shows the milkness results.

In the mountain pastures milking and cheese production are performed in a traditional way. Cheese and curd are produced, sometimes sour milk, all for sell in the mountain pastures to tourist and visitors.

Table 1 - MILKNESS AND CONTENT OF SOME COMPOUNDS IN MILK IN THE BOVKSA SHEEP

Year	Milk yield kg	Fat %	Protein %	Lactose %	Dry matter %	Milking days
1990	130	6.90	5.90	6.11	18.9	96
1991	149	6.85	5.92	5.83	18.6	108
1992	155	6.93	5.80	5.58	18.3	111
1993	192	6.36	5.84	6.12	18.7	124

1.7.3. Gain and meat

Lambs growth rate between 150 g and 210 g/day. At the age 50 to 80 days lambs are slaughtered. Dressing percentage ranges between 42 and 45. Meat is soft and tender with low content of fatty tissues. The conformation is not good. Only suckling lambs are sold, lambs are never fattened up to over 20 kgs.

1.7.4. Fertility

Ewes lamb only one lamb because of bad nutritive conditions during the winter. Winter is more than 6 months long in this Alpine region. The rate of twinning is only 10. Larger litters are rare. Lambings take place from March to May.

1.7.5. Health conditions

The Bovksa sheep breed is very resistant and adapted to poor nutritive conditions.

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