

SHEEP AND GOATS

Current situation

Sheep are kept for their milk, meat, wool and skins. In 2007 there were in EU-27⁴⁵ approximately 96 million sheep and 13 million goats. Spain and the UK keep about 50% of EU sheep,

Sheep farming remains the most traditional branch of agriculture, and has maintained a large array of different sheep breeds, developed over centuries to cope with a diverse range of habitats and climatic conditions. Sheep may be kept outside all year under extensive conditions or may be partly housed in buildings during the winter months and for indoor lambing. Goats, once known as the poor man's cow and kept in small numbers for domestic use in many European countries, are now also kept in larger flocks.

Lambs in particular feature in significant numbers in the intra-community trade in live animals, yet it is only in recent years that research into their welfare during transportation has been undertaken. Most of the animals involved are sent for slaughter. Live sheep are imported by a number of member states to supplement shortfalls in local production, which result in surplus capacity in abattoirs.

Some of the main animal welfare concerns relating to sheep and goats include:

Live transport and markets

An area of significant concern is the welfare of young surplus lambs transported for sale at markets for fattening, and sheep that are transported long distances for slaughter. Such long, complex journeys can not only cause significant animal welfare problems, but also increase the risk of spreading diseases.

Stockmanship and inspection

Good stockmanship is crucial to the welfare of sheep and goats. Sheep may be kept in flocks of more than 1000 animals, and/or in very extensive systems, and this raises particular problems of ensuring adequate supervision.

Lameness

Major causes of lameness in sheep include scald and foot rot, both painful bacterial infections. In many flocks effective control of these conditions is not being achieved and, in some cases, is being neglected. It is not uncommon to find 10% or more of a sheep flock lame and in obvious pain and distress. There is an urgent need to convince farmers that lameness should be better controlled, with the aim to eradicate diseases such as scald and foot rot from the flock.

External parasites

External parasites, such as sheep scab mite and those associated with fly strike, cause considerable distress to affected animals. Good preventative measures such as careful dipping of the flock are vital.

⁴⁵/DG Agriculture and Rural Development, "Agriculture in the European Union - Statistical and economic information 2008". Table on number of sheep and goats available at: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/agrista/2008/table_en/41701.pdf

Lamb mortality

Problems such as hypothermia, exposure, starvation, mis-mothering and disease can lead to high levels of lamb mortality. Factors such as good flock management and inspection, provision of adequate shelter, and control of diseases such as internal parasites are important in safeguarding lamb welfare.

Tail docking and castration

Many lambs are subject to tail docking and/or castration. Docking is undertaken to reduce the risk of flystrike, which involves flies laying eggs on soiled wool around the tail and back-end of the sheep, and the resulting maggots then eat away at the animal's flesh. If untreated, the condition can lead to death of the sheep. However, alternative control methods do exist, and the need for such a painful and stressful procedure on a routine basis has been increasingly questioned in recent years. Similarly, castration of lambs destined to be slaughtered before puberty cannot be justified, and undertaking of either procedure without use of pain killers (as currently permitted under EU legislation) clearly causes serious welfare problems.

Care and treatment of male kids

In commercial goat herds where milk production is the main aim, male offspring are often "surplus to requirements". In many cases, they are killed shortly after birth, and the incentive to care for them properly up to the time of their death is clearly low. This can lead to poor treatment and welfare issues, whilst the killing of newborn animals raises ethical questions.

Legislation

Council of Europe

The Council of Europe agreed in 1992 a *Recommendation concerning sheep* and a *Recommendation concerning goats* under the *Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes*. These lay down general principles for the husbandry and welfare of both species.

European Union

The framework of general welfare principles provided by the European Convention is implemented in the EU through *Council Directive 98/58/EC of 20 July 1998 concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes* which applies to sheep and goats, as to any other farmed animal. This directive provides for the drawing up of additional specific legislation for various species but as yet there is none covering sheep and goats on the farm. However, sheep and goats are covered by the provisions of *Council Directive 93/119/EC of 22 December 1993 on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing* and by *Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005 of 22 December 2004 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations*.

Council Regulation (EC) No 21/2004 establishing a system for the identification and registration of ovine and caprine animals was adopted in December 2003 and is part of the efforts to prevent the spread of animal diseases. Its objective is to be able to quickly determine the animals' place of origin and movements by gradually introducing an identification system to mark each animal. The European Commission planned to make electronic identification of individual sheep and goat compulsory. This was first postponed till 2010 and on 3 July 2008 it was decided by the Standing Committee of Food Chain and Animal Health to start with it from 1 January 2011 and for sheep born before 31 December 2009 from 31 December 2011.

National legislation

Tail docking of sheep or any other animal is banned in Finland. In the Netherlands, a ban was in place since September 2001, but under pressure from sheep breeders this ban was temporarily lifted. The ban was finally re-established from 1st January 2008 with an exemption for three breeds that may try to breed for a shorter tail with less wool.

Action needed

- The European Convention Recommendations concerning sheep and goats should be implemented in full through Community and member state legislation. Both the Community and the member states are parties to the convention.
- Further research and development on provision of effective and practical methods of delivering pain relief during/after castration and tail docking is urgently required, as are strict rules on when these two practices can be used.