

Potential for development of cashmere production in the EU

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF CASHMERE PRODUCTION IN THE UK

Cashmere farming in the UK developed from grazing ecology trials on hill pastures being undertaken in the early 1980s at the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute. Several farmers were attracted to the idea of producing this novel fibre because at that time there were:

1. Relatively poor returns from sheep farming.
2. Government calls for agricultural production to be diversified into non-food products.
3. Large stockpiles of all the main agricultural products
4. High world prices for cashmere fibre.

Cashmere Breeders Ltd. was formed with the objective of producing breeding stock of improved genetic merit for sale to the commercial farmer. Funding for the breeding programme was provided by the European Commission and also by funds administered by government agencies in Scotland.

In 1992, there were 18 producers in CBL and breeding progress was rapidly made. However, there was a limited demand from UK farmers for the commercial animals that were being produced.

CURRENT CONSTRAINTS ON CASHMERE PRODUCTION IN SCOTLAND

1. Goats are ineligible for all subsidies that are readily obtainable for sheep.
2. The economic recession resulted in the demand for cashmere garments to fall
3. The world price had fallen

These factors also resulted in the speculative, entrepreneurial type of breeders finding their stock greatly devalued, with consequential financial hardships. These troubled were seized on by the media, which discouraged further commercial interest in cashmere goats.

THE POTENTIAL FOR CASHMERE PRODUCTION IN THE REST OF EUROPE

In Southern Europe, cashmere goat producers would have many advantages that Scottish farmers do not.

1. A tradition of goat keeping
2. Subsidies available for goats
3. An established market for goat meat.

In addition, cashmere goats should thrive in the warmer, drier areas, in which the levels of intestinal parasitism should be reduced as well as the need for winter housing.

There is an established market for cashmere in Scotland, which continues to be a world leader in this field. There are also collection and grading facilities in Scotland that would be available for continental producers of cashmere.