

“Mohair des Fermes de France” - marketing French mohair

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In France the breeding of Angora goats and the production of mohair have developed considerably over the past fifteen years. This development can be broken down into three stages, as follows :

The first stage : a few pioneering farmers, who were seeking to diversify and create craft workshops using the products from their farms, introduced the Angora goat into France during the 1980's. Thanks to their strong motivation and perseverance, the French Ministry of Agriculture officially recognized the “Angora goat” breed, and they were granted approval for their UPRA, the Herd Book.

The second stage : the breeding of Angora goats spread rapidly all over France; it was in a way the “golden age” of the sale of breeding stock.

The third stage : this is still in progress, that is to say, the concern to market mohair and thus improve the income of the farmers, whilst at the same time developing and distributing genetic improvements.

CONSTRAINTS

France imports annually about 2,000 (two thousand) metric tons of untreated mohair, which is then processed in the French textile industry. About 80% of this production is then re-exported. It was this situation which first gave breeders the idea of organizing themselves to produce part of these imports in France itself. It was not long before they had to face facts : it was impossible to produce mohair in France and sell it untreated. The costs of production were higher than the selling price.

Some way had to be found of adding value to mohair with a finished product and by avoiding the middle man. So the breeders grouped themselves into independent structures to enhance the value of mohair by setting up marketing strategies.

ASSETS - THE SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT

France is a sort of federation of provinces, each one with its ancient local traditions. In France we often speak of the traditions of “productions de terroir”, or traditional country products. There is not a single region which is not identified with one or more products which have their origins in the place of production, usually in the local farms. Around this notion of “local products”, there has developed a whole network of direct sales marketing, straight from the producer to the consumer.

Just a short time ago, these direct sales were only to be found on the farm and in the local markets. Now, farmers and breeder-producers are beginning to use the most recent sales and communications techniques, enabling them to sell better and with greater efficiency to a wider public.

The consumer has a great attachment to the rural origin of certain products. After all, we do have more than three hundred different cheeses, more than one hundred and fifty wines, dozens of elixirs and liqueurs, not to mention fabrics from the Vosges, velvet from Troyes, sheets from Cholet, prints from Provence, and so on. Every city-dweller has a piece of the countryside in his heart.

We have subscribed Mohair from France to this same tradition; all the more so because there is a strong trend of recognition and renown in favour of country products. The consumer is looking for authenticity.

Over the past few years we have seen the growth and development in France of “tourisme vert”. This “green tourism” is the quiet discovery of a region by rubbing shoulders as much as possible with the local inhabitants, those men and women who create the richness of the countryside. These new tourists require various services, such as accommodation (in rented cottages, bed and breakfast, or farm-inns), or guided visits to farms, as well as local products. If the farmer wants to adapt to meet these new requirements, he will need to change the way he markets his products, his services and his know-how.

Angora goat breeders have understood what is at stake in such a development, and in response, they have formed themselves into interprofessional groups. Local and regional communities, urged on by active members of the rural population, have realised the economic and social implications of this future development, and are contributing with financial investments.

COLLECTIVE ACTIONS

Pooling of Production

As already mentioned, French farmers are unable to make a decent income from the production of untreated mohair. The farmers have formed themselves into groups so that their combined production should be of a sufficient quantity to interest the processors. An intermediary structure has therefore been formed by the farmers, between production and processing. Each structure develops, on behalf of its members, a certain number of products which are then returned to the farmers for them to put on the market. Being in a group also ensures that the products are of consistent and reliable quality.

The setting-up of a collective policy for marketing

Before 1991 no collective approach had been made to the consumer. An enquiry financed at the time by the profession confirmed the existence of a “niche” market for the direct sale of mohair. This overall assessment was followed by consumer research which revealed that the Angora goat was the prime asset of the producer, followed closely by the quality of reception, and the discovery of mohair products in welcoming surroundings. It also revealed an excellent brand image in relation to the classic sales outlets for mohair and wool.

All of this was very encouraging in a context such as that defined earlier :
- of real significance for traditional products and for the development of “green tourism”. To make the most of our assets and optimize our economic weight, we therefore decided to launch the identification of our product so as to create on the basis of mohair farms. This is how “Le Mohair des Fermes de France “ was born.

Mohair from the Farms of France - "Mohair des Fermes de France".

There were two aims behind this action :

1. To identify the mohair produced in the farms of France, and thus differentiate it from imported mohairs
2. To promote production and processing by public communication in order to increase sales and improve the breeders' incomes.

After an analysis of the requirements for identification, as well as a functional and economic analysis, and an analysis of individual and collective constraints, we came up with a name and logo to identify the mohair marketed by breeders :

“LE MOHAIR DES FERMES DE FRANCE”.

At the same time, in collaboration with colleagues in the industry, the processing organizations drew up specifications for standards of quality. These are subject to an annual review to take account of any improvements, and they serve as a reference for the follow-up and monitoring of manufacture and processing.

The trade mark “Le Mohair des Fermes de France” is granted only after official consent. It is the signature, the official stamp recognized by the consumer as the guarantee of the producer (i.e. the guarantee of what he produces and markets) to the consumer (i.e. the guarantee of the quality of what he purchases).

This official trade mark is a certificate which guarantees :

- the origin of the mohair (produced in the farms of France)
 - the quality associated with this origin of production
 - the quality of care in processing the product
- and - the respect of standard specifications and of the producer's charter.

The public authorities along with ASECAUM have taken action to promote wide-spread publicity campaigns and inform the general public about the industry.

By our dynamism we can show that breeding Angora goats, and the direct sales system which results from it, are enabling breeders to see a good future opening before them. They are compensating for a loss of farming income and transfer-

ring their know-how out of the agri-food business, and this is one of the major preoccupations of agriculture in the European Union.

Finally, it is our assertion that this “Angora goat” industry, the mohair from the farms of France, brings a quality of life and contributes to the modern profile of the farmer of tomorrow, independent, responsible, receptive, welcoming and aware of the social and economic realities of the contemporary world.

