

DOMINION OF CANADA—DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

KARAKUL (FUR-BEARING) SHEEP AND PERSIAN LAMB FUR PRODUCTION

by

A. A. MacMILLAN



Karakul Ram

PRODUCTION SERVICE



Published by authority of the Hon. James G. Gardiner
Minister of Agriculture
Ottawa, Canada

BREEDS OF SHEEP RECOGNIZED BY THE CANADIAN NATIONAL LIVE STOCK RECORDS, OTTAWA, ONT.

The only book of record published in Canada is the Canadian National Record for Sheep, issued on behalf of the Canadian Sheep Breeders' Association. In this record, the following breeds are included:—

Shropshire; Leicester; Oxford; Cotswold; Lincoln; Dorset; Hampshire; Southdown; Suffolk; Cheviot; Blackface; Romney; Rambouillet; Corriedale; Merino; Ryeland; Kerry Hill; Karakul.

The Canadian Sheep Breeders' Association, through the Canadian National Live Stock Records, recognize the following United States Breeders' Organizations:—

American Cheviot Sheep Society.....	Hartwick, N.Y.
American Corriedale Record.....	Cheyenne, Wyo.
American Cotswold Registry Assn.	Union Stock Yards, Chicago, Ill.
Continental Dorset Club.....	Hickory, Penn.
American Hampshire Sheep Assn.	72 Woodlawn Ave., Detroit, Mich.
Karakul Fur Sheep Registry.....	Union Stock Yards, Chicago, Ill.
American Leicester Breeders' Assn.	Cameron, Ill.
National Lincoln Sheep Breeders' Assn.	Marlette, Mich.
American and Deloraine-Merino Record Association.....	Xenia, Ohio.
American Oxford Down Record Assn.	Clayton, Ind.
American Rambouillet Sheep Brs. Assn. ...	Marysville, Ohio.
American Romney Breeders' Assn.	Corvallis, Ore.
American Shropshire Registry Assn.	LaFayette, Ind.
American Southdown Breeders Assn.	State College, Penn.

The original edition of this bulletin was prepared in 1918 by Geo. E. O'Brien, who was then a member of the staff of the Sheep and Goat Division, Dominion Live Stock Branch. The present edition has been revised and enlarged by A. A. MacMillan, Associate Chief, Live Stock and Poultry Division, Production Service.

KARAKUL (FUR BEARING) SHEEP AND PERSIAN LAMB FUR PRODUCTION

The Origin of the Karakul

The different authorities seem to be at variance regarding the origin of Karakul sheep, even those who have personally visited Bokhara, in Russian Turkestan, the native home of the Karakul. Like other domesticated animals, their development has been spread over many centuries, and the beginning of the breeding combinations which made them what they are now is simply not known. The natives of Bokhara apparently know absolutely nothing about their origin, while the Russian authorities on sheep-breeding, some of whom have visited and studied the sheep in Bokhara, are of the opinion that there is no way of knowing how Karakuls originated. It is said that the flocks of



Karakul ewe and young lamb

Karakul sheep in Bokhara present a motley picture of distinct groups of Karakul, Kirgis, Arabi, Shiraz and Afghan, with Karakul rams predominating. The name Arabi, often used in connection with Karakul sheep, comprises one of these groups, and it is probable that the foundation of the present fur-bearing sheep was the early native Arabi, in conjunction with the small, black Danadar sheep, now almost extinct. The Karakul takes its name from Kara-kul (Black Lake), a village in the eastern part of the province of Bokhara, where there are large flocks of these sheep. The area of Bokhara is about 85,000 square miles, and the number of sheep is estimated at from 3,000,000 to 4,000,000, while the average export of lambskins averages about 1,500,000.

Introduction to North America

In 1909 the first importation of Karakul sheep was brought into America, with the object of producing, on this side of the water, what is known to the trade as Persian lamb and Broadtail fur. This first importation consisted of fifteen head—ten ewes and five rams. Other importations to the United States followed in 1913 and 1914, with the result that during this time some fifty-four Karakuls were imported, the majority of which were rams, the purpose being to mate these rams with the domestic long woolled breeds. It was from these importations to the United States that the first Karakul sheep to arrive in Canada were obtained when, in the latter part of 1913, flocks were established in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. The following year other importations were made and several flocks were established in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Alberta.



Karakul lambs

Recognition as a Pure Breed in Canada

In 1938, upon recommendation of the Canadian Sheep Breeders' Association, the Karakul sheep was recognized as a pure breed under the Canadian National Live Stock Records, and in consequence thereof the Karakul Fur Sheep Registry is recognized as the official registry in the United States.

At the present time, 1939, there are four pure-bred flocks of these sheep in Canada. Recognition under the Canadian National Live Stock Records gives the breed equal status with other breeds of sheep in so far as registration is concerned, and it is expected that other pure-bred flocks may be established in the Dominion.

Breed Characteristics

The term Karakul applied to this breed is used in a general sense, since it has already been noted that there are a number of groups making up the breed in their native home, Bokhara. Those sheep, however, that have been brought into Canada, together with their descendants, conform very well to a distinct type, and may be described as follows:—

They are medium size, with black face and legs. The wool at maturity is grey and very long and coarse. At birth the lambs are almost invariably black, with the tightly-curved fur which is the desirable feature; as yearlings, the wool is still black, but with brownish tint; the following year turning to shades of grey. The rams have large horns curving outwards, while the ewes are polled, although sometimes the latter are also horned. The face is narrow, the eye full and bright, nose decidedly Roman, the ears small and pendulous, these last two features being very characteristic of the Karakul. The conformation of the Karakul does not serve well for mutton purposes, the back being narrow with flat sides and the rump drooping. The tail is the most distinctive characteristic, and is very broad next the body, perhaps eight to ten inches thick, and about the same length, usually ending in a sharp curve.

In making selections it should be noted that fine wool in the fleece is very objectionable, while the hair on the face and legs should be glossy black.



Half-blood Karakul lamb from Karakul-Lincoln cross

Cross-Bred Karakuls

Several thousand grade Karakul lambs have been produced in Canada, but owing to marketing difficulties and lack of a definite breeding policy, progress has been slow. Cross-breds produced from early importation made before the breed was recognized under the Canadian Live Stock Records, have largely deteriorated. The extent to which cross-breeding may again be developed will

depend on the breeding ability and standard of excellence of the pure-bred stock. If pure-bred Karakul rams have sufficient prepotency to transmit Persian lamb fur characteristics to their offspring when bred to selected ewes that will cross well with Karakul rams, there may be some incentive to develop a cross-breeding policy, although the percentage of good quality skins is not likely to be high. In southwest Africa, where considerable cross-breeding is done, only a low percentage of skins compares in quality with those of Russian origin.

If cross-breeding with Karakul rams is contemplated, careful attention should be paid to the type of grade ewe used. A fleece that is extremely coarse in quality and, if possible, black or grey in character, is desirable. The following breeds have been used in cross-breeding:—

Black-Faced Highland; Lincoln; Cotswold; Leicester and their crosses,

which may be selected for coarseness of fleece. (See U.S. Bulletin No. 1632.)

Hardiness and Adaptability to Canadian Conditions

In its natural habitat in Bokhara, the Karakul sheep has to withstand extreme temperatures and dry seasons. The breed, therefore, has many hardy qualities and while conditions in Canada may be much different to those prevailing in its native country, there is no reason to suppose that the breed would not thrive under conditions of good management in the Dominion. It may be that certain soil types would be more desirable for the production of fur than others, and it may also be that certain feeds are better than others during the period of pregnancy. There is very little by way of experiment or experience that can be pointed to as a guide to prospective breeders.

Selection of Breeding Stock

The following are matters that should receive careful consideration when purchasing stock to establish a flock of these sheep.

1. Something should be known of the ability of the sire and dam to produce lambs whose pelts are of Persian quality.
2. The value of lamb pelts varies from little or no value up to around \$10. The value of breeding stock should not greatly exceed the probable return in Persian pelts.
3. Considerable attention should be paid to securing a knowledge of what the essentials of a Persian pelt are, and having acquired this knowledge first hand information should be obtained as to the breeding ability of the flock, or flocks, from which it is intended to make purchases.

Mutton Qualities

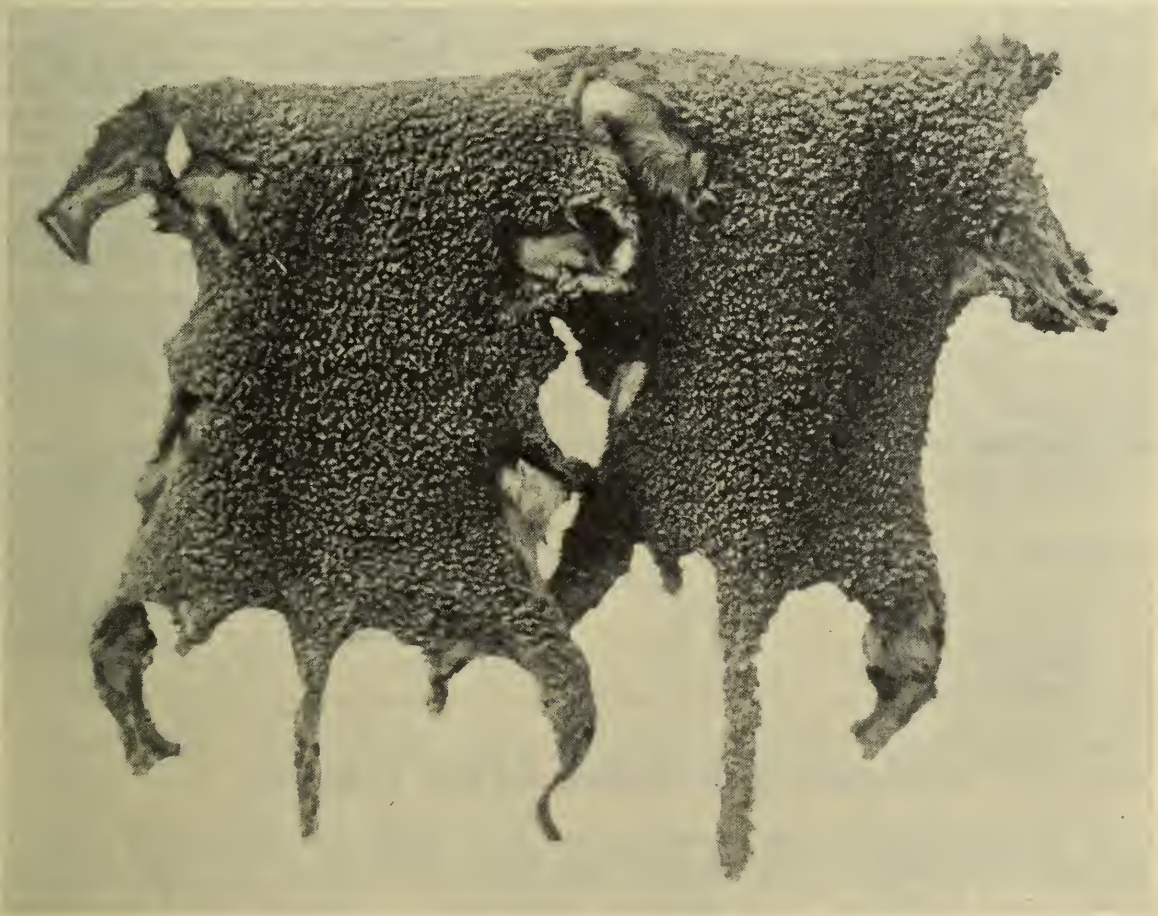
In general conformation of the Karakul is not a good mutton type and being somewhat angular and rangy, with the heavy tail a definite objection, the breed is not to be compared with other well known Canadian breeds for lamb production. Since lambs suitable for Persian fur are slaughtered when a few days old, it is hardly likely that the ewes have been selected for milking qualities, and this would be a definite drawback in the production of market lambs. It is said that Karakul lambs grow most rapidly when young, so that in the case of wether lambs not good enough for pelting purposes, marketing should take place as soon as they have reached reasonable weight and finish.

Karakul Wool

Like the improved breeds of sheep, the Karakul may be shorn for its wool. The quality of the fleece is extremely coarse, being of a grade known as braid or carpet wool. The colour varies from a grey to a dark brown, and fleece weights range from seven to nine pounds.

Persian (Baby Lamb Fur)

Persian lamb fur is the primary marketable product from Karakul sheep. Both in Canada and the United States there is a keen demand for this fur, which is being filled mostly from Asiatic countries through the production of the same Karakul sheep. Persian lamb fur is obtained by killing the young Karakul lambs when only a few days to a few weeks old. At this age the fur is very black and tightly curled. As the lamb grows older the curl rapidly loosens and the skin loses its value. The qualities determining the value of a skin are lightness, size of curl, character, lustre and size of skin.



Persian lamb skins produced from Karakul-Lincoln cross

Another quality of fur, also a product of the Karakul, is Broadtail. This class of fur, coming mostly from prematurely born lambs, usually possesses more lustre and a flatter closer wave. Skins of this type, when strong and of good size, are usually the most valuable.

These two classes of fur, Persian lamb and Broadtail, are invariably black when taken from the young Karakul lamb. There is, however, another class which is usually included with the above by the fur trade, namely, Krimmer fur. This class is very similar to the Persian, except that it is grey and dressed

in its natural state. It is said to be a product of the Karakul produced mainly in the Crimean Peninsula. So far as is known, none of this class of fur has been produced by the Karakuls in Canada.

The age at which it is best to take a lamb pelt depends solely upon each individual lamb. A few days, a week or even two weeks, may be the right time. The time must be decided by each breeder from observation. As a rule, after two weeks the fur begins to take on a woolly aspect and the curls begin to open out.

It is important for the novice to realize that although a lambskin may be black and curly it may still have little value as Persian lamb fur. Even in flocks of good breeding, there is usually quite a variation in the value of skins produced.

Fur Classification	Serviceability	Price Range	Remarks
Persian Lamb (full-bred)...	Good to fair....	Moderate to high.	When the lustre is high, the curl firm and well developed in all parts of the peltry, it has good serviceability. If the lustre is scattered and not very bright, it has only fair serviceability. If the lustre is dull and the curls lacking in character, with a tendency to kinkiness or wooliness, the serviceability is low. In the latter group will be found cross-bred or half-Persians. Paws and other parts of the peltry which are cut away in manufacturing garments, because these pieces do not always match well, are sewn together in large sheets or plates. Reliable stores describe this fact to the customer.
Broadtail Persian Lamb....	Low.....	Expensive.....	Light or dress wear. Young or prematurely born Persian type. Beautiful moire character, thin in leather and flat haired. Best type distinguished by well moired markings; firm texture.
Cross Persian Lamb.....	Fair to low....	Moderate to low	Strictly speaking, these varieties are not full blooded Persian lamb. They are called cross-bred Persian lambs or half Persians, because they are produced by breeding pure Karakul rams to ewes carrying blood other than that of the Karakul. This classification may include pelts from pure-bred lambs that are not good enough for the two higher classifications.

Trends in Marketing Persian Peltries

Before the U.S.S.R. Government came into being, the skins were collected by dealers and traders to be packed into bales for export. At this time the skins were sold according to quality and uniformity. After the U.S.S.R. Government began to function, it was decided to dress and dye the skins in the U.S.S.R. and expert dressers and dyers were brought into the country to develop the new industry. This caused a drastic change in trading which, in its initial stages, was not entirely satisfactory to those countries that had been large users of Persian skins. The result was that the sale of Persian fur suffered for a time. Of late years, the breeding of Karakul sheep in Southwest Africa has resulted in the production of upwards of 250,000 skins annually. This supply, together with a more liberal offering of raw skins, marketed as such from the U.S.S.R., has tended to bring marketing conditions back to a more normal basis. The U.S.S.R. still continues to be the main source of the best fur, although rapid improvement is being effected in breeding for better fur in Africa, the United States and Canada.

Canadian Market for Persian Fur Skins

The value of Persian pelts depends on character, lightness, size of skins, durability, fine quality of fur, evenness and size in formation of the curl and the ultimate lustre which is produced by process. Considerable variation in type and quality of Persian fur will be produced from strains or individuals in each pure- or cross-bred flock. One of the difficulties which Canadian breeders will face in the initial stages of the industry is the ability to produce a sufficient number of skins of a standard quality that will match. Size enters into the value of a pelt to a great extent, but not to the same extent as lightness, quality and lustre. Skins may be consigned to the Fur Auctions at Montreal, Winnipeg, Edmonton and Vancouver, the Canadian Co-operative Wool Growers, Limited, Weston, Ontario, or be sold to any raw fur dealer. The Canadian trade in Persian lamb amounted in 1937 to approximately a quarter of a million peltries. If this type of fur were to grow in popularity, the number of peltries used might easily reach half a million. There is, therefore, an unlimited market for good peltries for many years to come. Canada is fortunate in that Canadian firms are among the leading dressers and dyers of Persian lamb peltries in the world. The cost of dressing and dyeing Persian peltries is 60 cents each, in baled lots of 160 or more, and 75 cents each for individual skins or small lots.

Curing Raw Skins

Fur pelts must be removed carefully to avoid any cuts in the body, head, legs or tail. Remove all fat or meat from the pelt after skinning. These should be carefully cured for shipment. There are various methods of curing, but whatever method is used, the maintenance of durability in the pelt should always be kept in mind. Some cure by drying in the shade, others pickle the pelts, and others treat with a mixture of barley meal and salt, sprinkling the fur side of the pelt with flour or sand to keep the curl from opening up. Skins should never be doubled or salted as this reduces pliability causing the skins to crack. Skins should always be packed for shipment two by two, skin side together and never more than four together.

The dipping of skins in the following arsenical solution is said to be approved by Karakul skin dealers in London, England.


Arsenic.. . . .	2·7 ozs.
Washing Soda.. . . .	3·3 ozs.
Water.. . . .	1-3 gal.

Place in pot and boil, stirring constantly. Remove from fire and add 2-3 gallons of water, stirring it in to the more concentrated mixture. A gallon of this mixture is sufficient for 30 skins.

After treating, spread skins carefully on a clean floor, fur side down. Spread all parts of the skin evenly. If skins are tacked to the floor, be careful not to stretch too tightly before tacking the edge of the skin to the floor. Sprinkle a coating of bran evenly over the skin. The bran can be brushed off before shipping.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author wishes to acknowledge the valuable assistance secured from F. D. Burkholder, Ottawa, and Maranda & Labrecque, Quebec, P.Q.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012 with funding from
Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada – Agriculture et Agroalimentaire Canada

CAL/BCA OTTAWA K1A 0C5



3 9073 00183879 8

