

## **Introduction**

### **HUNGARY**

The long-term sustainability of professional sheep and goat breeding is more endangered in the European Union than ever. In spite of the scarcity of mutton production in the EU the number of sheep is decreasing and the demand is falling... Many breeders give up breeding sheep and goats due to economic difficulties, the high demand of invested work and their older age. The import from third world countries brings an increasing pressure to bear on their activities. .. Sheep and goat breeding however plays a role of key importance in the environment protection, which includes natural maintenance of less fertile areas, biodiversity, preservation of sensible ecosystems and of water quality, furthermore, it helps prevent soil erosion, floods, avalanches and fires. Sheep and goat live in areas of lesser soil quality; therefore their breeding is essential for the rural economy in the EU.<sup>1</sup>

**Hungary** is located in Central Europe, in the Carpathian Basin surrounded by the Carpathians, the Alps and the Dinaric Mountains. The territory of the country is 93,030 square kilometres, covering about 1 per cent of Europe. Hungary is a mixture of eastern and western cultural influences together with the traditions of a 1000-year-old state. Pagan tribes arrived in the Carpathian Basin around 896 and assimilated the smaller and greater local tribes. Later on, throughout their history, Hungarian rulers invited priests, artists and teachers to enrich Hungarian culture. Monuments of the Roman Empire as well as spas from the age of the 150-year-long Turkish rule, medieval castles and magnificent cathedrals all bear witness to a stirring history.

Administratively, Hungary is divided into 19 counties. In addition, the capital city, Budapest, is independent of any county government. The counties and the capital are the 20 NUTS third-level units of Hungary.

Hungary is a member of OECD, NATO, EU and a Schengen state.

Despite its relatively small size, the country is home to numerous World Heritage Sites, UNESCO Biosphere reserves, the second largest thermal lake in the world (Lake Hévíz), the largest lake in Central Europe (Lake Balaton), and the largest natural grassland in Europe (Hortobágy).<sup>2</sup>

Several million people of Hungarian nationality are living outside the current country borders, most of them in the surrounding countries (Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria). The most significant region – concerning sheep breeding – is Transylvania, which is a part of Romania. The review of Hungarian sheep breeding and herdsman's life is unimaginable without researching this geographical area.

#### **Different species – diversity of local species**

Since sheep's domestication took place before the use of writing, there are no written reports to inform about the species of wild sheep, whose domestication contributed to the development of the domestic sheep. There are, however several theories to explain the process. Although we don't know when the domestication had started, we have knowledge about the keeping of sheep – besides other domestic animals - by Neolithic man. Numerous local, specific species of sheep had developed, many species cover different regions and cultures as common element. Sheep are present in Europe, Asia, Africa and America – in every continent. Their economic and cultural importance has changed a lot but they play again

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<sup>1</sup> Report on the future of sheep/lamb and goat sector in Europe (2007/2192(INI)) – Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Parliament. Lecturer: Liam Aylward

<sup>2</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungary>

an important role in the bio/eco/organic agriculture and animal husbandry everywhere in Europe, this is especially true for traditional, local species.

*The species of racka, cigaja, curkan were the most important sheep in Hungary till the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the merino sheep started gradually to outnumber them. Cross breeding of different species as a consequence of co-existence of peoples, the interbreeding of different flocks contributed to the creation of a multicoloured sheep-culture in Europe.*

### **Different forms of the keeping**

In springtime, generally on the day of St. George (24th April), seldom on the day of St. Joseph, or on the 1st May, the sheep were driven to a certain part of the fields, normally of lesser quality, which was not suitable for other animals. In earlier times, when farmers applied rotation of crops, sheep were driven to fallow land.

There is a difference in the ways and grades between extensive and intensive breeding.

The feeding of animals in extensive breeding is based on grazing; it is connected to migration, simple buildings, little investment of labor and low efficiency. Extensive breeding was widely practiced during the feudalism, mainly the young and slaughter livestock were bred this way. Work-, milking-animals and those which were used for transportation were bred more intensively; they were fed and kept better. The two types of breeding were present in Hungary simultaneously probably since the Conquest of Hungary. The intensive breeding grew slowly by degrees and because of this extensive decreased.

Differences can be made based on the constructions and on the owners of the flock (ownership by farms, manors, shepherds).

The forms of animal husbandry with and without permanent accommodation have developed.

In 1957, László Földes divided the sheep breeding in the Carpathian-basin to the following four regional and partly historical groups – mainly based on the type of buildings: 1. Alpine shepherding, 2. Kosarazó shepherding (*moving the sheep-pen from one place to another so the sheep could fertilize the land*), 3. Racka breeding on the Great Hungarian Plain, 4. Merino breeding.<sup>3</sup>

The whole system of Hungarian sheep breeding changed with the introduction of the western merino breeds in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and their spread – because of the wool prosperity – in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Instead of the extensive breeding of racka, merino brought the change of breeding method and a new building type the sheep-cote appeared.

### **Benefits of keeping sheep**

Keeping sheep had several economic reasons; keeping sheep allowed to produce numerous products. As a consequence of milk processing several local types of cheese were being produced.

The historical and archeological sources confirm that the consumption of pork became significant only in the last 100-150 years. Earlier cattle-meat and lamb had greater role in the alimentation of Hungarians. In sheep breeding households the most important period of consumption was between the harvest in the autumn and pig slaughter.

The curd-cheese culture and yoghurt making methods of Hungarians in the Middle Ages – which did not include rennet – was completed with the cheese-culture using stomach- or vegetable rennet.

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<sup>3</sup> FÖLDES László: A juhtartás típusai és építményei a Kárpátmedencében. *Néprajzi Közlemények*. II. évf. (1957) 1–2. sz. 149–156.

One of the most important yields of sheep breeding was the wool, which appeared in clothing culture, household textiles and fine arts.

Wool was one of the most important economic forces in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Wool processing promoted the development of the textile industry everywhere in Europe. Wool is used for clothing and for household textiles

A special type of fertilization in the Middle-Mountain regions was the *kosarazás*; the land was fertilized by the transportation of the dismountable and movable sheep-pen. The great historical background of heating with manure is proved by not only the origin of the word, but also its geographical incidence. Heating with animal manure was very well known and the word *tőzeg (turf)* has Turkish origins before the Conquest of Hungary.

### **Sheep breeding today**

Sheep breeding, like any other activity, is affected by several factors. The most important factor is the demand for sheep products, which is completed in Europe by the purposes of use of certain areas and landscape protection, furthermore by the necessity of providing jobs and preventing the migration of the population.

The importance and advantages of biodiversity and ecologic farming forms have to be highlighted. The economic geography of different regions can be studied from the view of sheep breeding and of tourism linked to sheep keeping: from environment point a sustainable rural development, which takes into consideration the most important, locally specific ecologic values, the regional structure of agriculture, the cultural traditions of the built environment and the touristic sector.

### **The sheep as a symbol in the intangible heritage and in the art**

Beyond the concrete and realistic depiction a symbolic value is attached to the lamb too, therefore lamb's depictions spread fast. The sheep plays an important role in different religions in Europe and in the whole world. The project's expansion in this direction, the presentation of research in this field and of its results may contribute to the dialogue and reconciliation between religions, since the sheep/lamb are important parts of the Christian, Jewish and Islamic cultures too.

The knowledge of the shepherds (healing, knowledge about medicinal herbs and about their use) means a unique culture as well, the customs, songs and dances related to shepherds and sheep breeding.

The herdsmen preserved a unique repertoire in folklore, due to their separate social position. The topics of their songs, their dependence from nature, the herdsmen's harsh life and the outlaws (*betyárs*) attraction towards the ideal of freedom made the herdsmen's knowledge very different from those of the peasants. This is obvious in their instrumental and dance traditions, which are only practiced by them.