

Unit 7: Sheep and Goat Production and Management

Sheep and Goat Breeds and Methods of Selection

Overview: Indigenous sheep and goat breeds in Ethiopia have developed unique adaptations to survive under harsh environmental conditions, such as extreme climates, poor quality feed, seasonal feed and water shortages, and exposure to endemic diseases and parasites.

Sheep Breeds in Ethiopia:

1. Menz Sheep:

- **Habitat:** Found in North Shoa and parts of Wollo zone, Amhara region.
- **Characteristics:** Compact body covered with coarse hair and a woolly undercoat. The coat is typically black or dark brown, with occasional white spots. Rams often have twisted horns, while ewes are usually hornless.
- **Wool Production:** Shearing is done twice a year, yielding 1 - 1.6 kg of wool, which is used for making traditional blankets and "Burnos."
- **Physical Traits:** Mean height at the shoulder is 64 cm for rams and 58 cm for ewes. Weight ranges from 2.3 kg at birth to 35 kg at maturity. Twin births are common, sometimes reaching 60%.

2. Afar Sheep:

- **Habitat:** Middle Awash Valley in eastern Ethiopia, extending to Dire Dawa and Bati.
- **Characteristics:** Small-sized, hardy breed with a mature weight of 30 - 35 kg. The breed is well adapted to drought conditions.
- **Physical Traits:** Predominantly blond in color, with short and coarse hair. The fat tail is a distinguishing feature, reaching below the hocks. Weighs about 2.5 kg at birth and 31.6 kg at maturity. Twin births are rare.

Goat Breeds in Ethiopia:

1. Afar Goats:

- **Habitat:** Afar Region, northern and western Hararghe, and parts of Eritrea and Djibouti.
- **Characteristics:** Well adapted to arid environments, watered every 3-4 days. Both males and females are horned, and most males have beards.
- **Uses:** Maintained for meat, milk, skin production, and social purposes such as dowries.

2. Arsi-Bale Goats:

- **Habitat:** Arsi, Bale, and western Hararghe zones of Oromia Region, and high-altitude areas of Sidama.
- **Characteristics:** Straight facial profile with curved, backward-pointing horns in males. Noted for twin and multiple kidding.
- **Uses:** Reared for meat, milk, and skin production.

These indigenous breeds are crucial for sustaining livestock production in Ethiopia's diverse and challenging environments. Understanding their characteristics and the methods of selection is vital for improving productivity and ensuring the sustainability of sheep and goat farming in the region.

Exotic Sheep and Goat Breeds

Exotic sheep and goat breeds have been introduced to different parts of the world, including Ethiopia, to enhance local livestock's productivity in meat, milk, and wool. These breeds are selected for their superior qualities compared to local breeds.

Exotic Sheep Breeds

- **Merino, Corriedale, Romney, Hampshire, and Bleu du Maine:** These sheep breeds are renowned for their wool and meat production. They have been introduced to improve the quality and quantity of fiber and meat from local sheep, such as the Menz breed in Ethiopia.
- **Awassi:** This breed, originating from the Middle East, is known for its meat, milk, and coarse wool production. The Awassi sheep are hardy, easy to manage, and well-suited for both grazing and confined operations.
- **Dorper:** Developed in South Africa, the Dorper sheep is a meat breed known for its rapid growth and adaptability to various environments, particularly dry regions.

Exotic Goat Breeds

- **Anglo-Nubian:** A dual-purpose breed for meat and milk, the Anglo-Nubian goat is large and well-adapted to tropical climates. It was introduced to Ethiopia to improve the milk production of local breeds.
- **Boer:** This South African breed is primarily known for its meat production. Boer goats are robust, with a large frame and distinctive coloring—white bodies with brown or red on the head and neck.

Key Concepts to Remember

- **Adaptability:** Exotic breeds must be well-adapted to the local environment for successful integration and productivity improvement.
- **Breed Selection:** Selection of these breeds for introduction should be based on their performance and adaptability under local conditions.

This activity will help you understand the practical aspects of breed selection and the importance of using well-adapted breeds in local environments.