Organic opportunities and challenges: 
The next generation of the wool industry

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2 IFOAM Organics International
3 Research institute of Organic Agriculture – FiBL

FUTURE PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

Organic sheep production provides a good-practice example of a sustainable and animal welfare-friendly system. On-farm, specific challenges relate to the implementation of the organic system with regard to veterinary management and feeding according to established organic standards. Effective methods are available, and these provide confidence to farmers considering conversion to organic, enabling them to exploit the opportunity for organic wool production.

GOTS provides detailed processing standards that can contribute to environmental protection during the processing of wool6. With new techniques for processing that can further reduce the environmental impact, the future prospects are good for the production of wool products for fashion, apparel, baby wear and home textile products. GOTS has recently introduced a tool for monitoring water and energy use during processing – offering the potential to benchmark and reduce the environmental impact of organic processing.

Producing high quality and traceable organic wool products that are attractive to consumers meets a growing demand for organic textiles, and represents an opportunity for the wool industry worldwide.

ORGANIC SHEEP PRODUCTION

Around 1% of the world’s sheep are organically managed with a total flock in 2013 of almost 12 million4 (see Table 1). More than half the sheep are in Asia and with almost all in China (data from China has only been available since 2013). In Europe, 4.4% of the sheep are organically managed as are 3.5% of the sheep in the UK. A 10-15% premium for organic wool can be achieved over non-organic prices.

Organic sheep production standards require high welfare systems. Organic feed, good husbandry and permitted veterinary inputs maintain health and allow economically viable production.

Internationally, standards based on common organic principles set by IFOAM-Organics International3 are implemented through regulation in Europe, USA, Canada and around the world4. On farm organic sheep production is inspected and verified by independent organic certification bodies5.

ORGANIC SHEEP NUMBERS – GLOBAL 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Sheep (million)</th>
<th>% Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>0.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>53.41</td>
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<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
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<td>37.53</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
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<td>8.90</td>
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<tr>
<td>USA &amp; Canada</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>11.82</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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REFERENCES

2 Data Source: Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), Organic Sheep Numbers Global 2011-2013. FiBL, Frick, Switzerland. See www.organic-world.net. Last updated: 17/02/2015