

THE KALARRITIKO SHEEP BREED

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Kalarritiko sheep breed is one of the variants of the mountain breeds. Its name derives from the mountain village of Kalarrites in Ioannina, where in the past it has been raised in high numbers. It is said that the breed originates from the neighbour village SIRRAKO and from there it has been spread to Kalarrites, where later it has been diversified in the colour of head, ears and legs. Sheep farmers claim that the Kalarritiko sheep has derived from crossbreeding of the Orino breed of Epirus with the Comisana sheep of Sicily, which was imported by traders from SIRRAKO in the middle of the 18th century, aiming at the production of better quality and quantity wool. Farmers from SIRRAKO used to keep about 120.000 heads, which grazed during the summer months in the mountainous pastures of Tzoumerka, and also in Smolikas and Agrafa and during the winter they moved at the plains of south Epirus and the nearest regions of Thessaly.

Today the population of the Kalarritiko breed, numbers about 5.350 heads, kept in 20 purebred flocks in Ioannina, Trikala and Karditsa. Kalarritiko sheep is of small size, with low feeding requirements, shows high adaptability to mountainous environment (altitude 1300 m and higher). It is considered as a breed threatened by extinction and the breeders receive incentives for the conservation of the breed from the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Food.

The colouring is white. The face in the bigger part has a uniform, deep or pale red coloration, also the ears and often the feet. The forehead is usually white, with a small convex profile. The head is of medium to large size. The ears have horizontal orientation, slightly curved downwards and they are medium to large size. The rams have big, spiral and strong horns, while the ewes are hornless. Kalarritiko sheep is characterised as an excellent meat producing breed.

It has a deep and wide chest, about 19 cm with high muscular growth. Its depth is about 30 cm and the perimeter of chest is about 93 cm. It has a medium length body about 63 cm with a short and heavy neck. Wither height of rams is about 65 to 68 cm and weight about 60-65 kg, while for the ewes is about 57-60 cm and 42-46 kg, respectively. The length of body reaches the 63 cm. The legs are short, about 30 cm, and strong. The tail is in the base wide and is covered by thick wool. The wool is almost uniform, thick and very soft. The udder is of medium size, good attachment and milkability. The teats have a light side direction and the length is about 3.5 -4.0 cm, suitable for milking and suckling.

Mating of ewes usually starts from the beginning of June till the beginning of August. Lambings occur from November till the middle of January. Late lambings occur from the beginning February until the middle of March. The 15-20% lambings are twins. Prolificacy ranges from 1.1 to 1.15 and mortality during the first 10 days of suckling is about 3-4%. Lambs for slaughtering are weaned in the end of the 6th week and weight 12-12.5 kg, while the lambs for reproduction replacements suckle until the age of 2 months and weight about 15 kg. Dressing percentage ranges between 60 to 65 % and the meat is of excellent quality. Commercial milk yield per ewe is about 100-110 kg, depending on the suckling duration of

the lambs. Lactation length is less than 200 days. Fat content ranges between 8-9% and protein content about 6%.

Vital role in the conservation of the breed had the breeders that were emotionally linked to the breed and they object to the introduction of foreign genetic material in their flocks. It deserves to take active conservation measures and study in depth the breed, as it poses special characteristics and is very close linked to the history and the people of the region it is raised.

Table. Characteristics of the Kalarritiko sheep breed

Measurements		
	Rams	Ewes
Wither height	65-68 cm.	57-60 cm.
Live weight	60-65 kg.	42-46 kg.
Reproduction traits		
Prolificacy (born lambs per lambing)	1,10-1,15	
Birth weight of lambs	3,0-3,5 kg.	
Weaning weight of lambs	12,0-12,5 kg.	
Age of ewes at first lambing	16-22 months	
Lambing interval	12 months	
Production traits		
Commercial milk yield	100-110 kg.	
Fat content	8-9%	
Protein content	5,5-6,0%	
Age of lambs at slaughter	40-45 days	
Dressing percentage	60-65%	
Wool	1,0-2,3 kg.	