

## **PRESENT AND PERSPECTIVE IN SHEEP REARING AND EXPLOITATION WITHIN ROMANIAN ORGANIC FARMS**

**Man C., Piroska Lorincz, I. Ivan, Paula Hui**

University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, Faculty of Animal Science and Biotechnologies, 3-5 Manastur Street, 400372 Cluj-Napoca, Romania  
email: [cornelman@gmail.ro](mailto:cornelman@gmail.ro)

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**Abstract.** The synthetic situation of sheep rearing in Romania, present and perspectives of organic sheep exploitation within national conditions are presented in this paper, describing the situation by regions (North – East, South – East, South – West - Oltenia , West, North – West, Central, South – Muntenia, and București – Ilfov). The influence of the Romanian accession to European Union and new exigencies that farmers must consider are also emphasized. The perspectives of sheep rearing using the organic system and its advantages is described besides the importance of taking into account the material advantages of this system if the national authorities will support it in the future.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Ourdays, Romania has an effective of 8.8 millions of sheep and goats occupying the 5<sup>th</sup> place among the 27 countries of the European Union (the Romanian sheep effective represents 7.6% of the EU).

Due to the not justified decrease of the wool request and price, the milk and meat production have the major share and farms incomes. The genuine breeds Turcana and Tigaia, in mountain and hilly areas are responsible for 52 - 60% of annual incomes due to milk production and essentially contribute to fulfilling of the daily ratio of the rural area people with valuable animal proteins.

The total sheep and goat effective is spread between great numbers of farms. According to the data cited by Drăgănescu C. (1997) and MADR statistics, in Romania exist 1.08 millions farmers, which have 2 - 20 sheep heads, about 40 - 500 farms with 20 - 200 sheep and goats. The real farms with 200 - 500 sheep heads are in number of 1120, and those with more than 500 heads are not over 400.

According to some authors (Taftă V. 1997, 2001; Pădeanu I. 2001; Man C. 2000, 2002, 2007; Maerescu Cristina et al. 2002, 2007; Dinescu S. 2001; Dărăban St. 2006), results that in sheep rearing precarious technologies are still in use, without a coherent programme of improvement and breed zoning, and obtained productions are under the possibilities level.

The Romanian accession to European Union brought new exigencies to farmers. The norms of bio-security applied in farms are more severe, new exigencies were imposed, sometimes on hygiene line and safety of the animal origin food, so that the sheep and goat dairy producers must face difficulties sometime hard to avoid.

But in Romania, the tradition of sheep rearing and obtaining dairy products is too strong to not search solution for surviving. One of the solutions tested by the producers is to convert the system towards the organic rearing and exploitation system.

### The present evolution and situation of sheep rearing in organic system

**In European countries** with large sheep effectives and developed organic agriculture (Italy, Greece, Spain, France, UK), about 12 - 15% of dairy sheep and goats are reared in organic system (FAO estimation, 2007). The organic milk is both industrially and manually processed leading to products of high quality, with high request on the market (Bencini R. 1993, 1997; Bertoni G. 1992; Kalantzopoulos G. 1993; Murphy J.J. et al. 1993; Pulina G et al. 1993).

**In Romania**, about 4,400 – 4,500 thousands hL sheep and goat milk are presently produced, but the statistics are not complete, because small milk quantities are processed in unities that correspond to EU norms.

The organic system of sheep rearing started in 2000, with a certified effective of 1700 sheep and 701 hL processed organic milk. The organic system recorded more rapid extension than neighbour countries (Table 1).

Table 1

The evolution of the organic certified sheep effective and milk production  
(Teodora Aldescu, 2008; Man C, 2007)

| Issue                                                     | 2,000 | 2001   | 2002   | 2003   | 2004   | 2005   | 2006   | 2007   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Sheep (head)                                              | 1,700 | 3,700  | 3,000  | 3,200  | 3,200  | 40,500 | 86,100 | 96,200 |
| Certified milk (hL)                                       | 701   | 1,740  | 1,360  | 1,470  | 1,800  | 13,500 | 26,000 | 28,000 |
| Sheep salt cheese (t)                                     | 18    | 46     | 36     | 45     | 48     | 480    | 520    | 600    |
| Pastures, other fields destined to forage production (Ha) | 9,300 | 14,000 | 20,000 | 24,000 | 31,300 | 42,300 | 51,200 | 55,000 |

In the beginning of 2008, in the files of the department of "Organic agriculture" from MADR, 176 operators dealing with organic sheep rearing, divided in 16 counties (Fig.1), are mentioned. They represent 11.5% of the owners of farms with more than 200 sheep and goats.



Fig.1 The repartition by counties of the operators dealing with organic sheep rearing

The organic farmers own a total effective of 96,200 certified sheep and goat heads, representing 1.10% of total effective and obtain about 28,000 hL organic milk, with 0.62% share of total sheep and goat milk (Aldescu Teodora, 2008; Man C. 2007; MADR).

For a better knowledge of the *status quo* we shall present the situation by areas of economical development.

**The North - East area** (counties of BC, BS, IS, NT, SV, VS) produces about 730 thousands hL sheep and goat milk by year. Among sheep owners, 57 farms and 3 processors are recorded at MADR as operators in organic agriculture. They own certified cattle, sheep, goats, and pastures. Majority are from the county of Suceava and main organic production is the cow milk, but they also have certified sheep.

**The South – East area** (counties of BR, BZ, CT, GL, TL, VR) will annually produce about 1,053 thousands hL sheep and goat milk (the biggest quantity from the 8 regions of development). We mention that in county of Tulcea, 18 farms that own 10,000 sheep and goat heads and 3,000 Ha field destined for forage production, use organic system of exploitation. The organic farms are placed near and within the sites Natura 2000 (protected areas from the Măcin Mountains and Casimcea Hill) and are financially helped with funds from Denmark, which also offer market for their products.

**The South – West area, Oltenia** (counties of DJ, GJ, MH, OL, VL) has an annual production of about 242 thousands hL sheep and goat milk. The effectives are spread in many small farms and only 2 sheep farms use the organic system, which process the milk at the producer.

**The West area** (counties of AR, CS, HD, TM) has great possibilities, but produces only about 400 – 500 thousands hL of sheep and goat milk, the production being especially oriented to meat. There are 4 organic farmers, which own both sheep (TM) and goats (HD).

**The North – West area** (counties of BH, CJ, BN, MM, SM, SJ) is recognized with tradition in sheep and goat rearing, and has an important effective producing over 670 thousands hL sheep and goat milk. In each of the component counties are certified organic farmers. In county of Cluj will appear the *first organic brand of Cluj* – mould cheese produced at Hoia – Mănăştur farm, from sheep milk. The farm belongs to U.S.A.M.V. Cluj-Napoca, has 500 sheep and it is certified from the year 2008.

**The Central area** (counties of AB, BV, CV, HG, MS, SB) is the biggest sheep and goat milk producer. Annually, over 1030 thousands hL milk is obtained here. In each county of the area there are certified and in conversion sheep farmers, but the county of Sibiu has a special situation, being on the first place in our country concerning the sheep rearing in organic system.

In 2000, ASI Nature Sibiu society with foreign capital, adopted the organic system. It owns a sheep farm with 3,000 – 5,000 heads and a modern factory which functions according to EU norms and processes the sheep milk. Many sheep owners from this county adopted the organic system and become clients of the ASI Nature. Now, in the county of Sibiu, 3 processors and 72 operators are recorded. They own 7,060 Ha field destined to forage producing, 573 cattle, 200 honeybee families and 36,448 sheep and goats ecologically certified or in conversion (1<sup>st</sup> and/or 2<sup>nd</sup> year).

We mention that 8.22% of the sheep effective from the county is reared in organic system, and the 72 farmers deliver about 80% of the obtained milk to the processing unity, which produces sheep salt cheese, and in the last time organic Haarbach cheese requested on the European market.

About 20% of the sheep and goat milk obtained by the farmers is traditionally processed where is obtained, producing salt cheese, fresh cheese, smoked cheese, for the own consumption, especially.

**The South (Muntenia) and București – Ilfov areas**, are small sheep milk producers (about 160 thousands hL by year), but here also are recorded some operators using the organic sheep rearing system (county of Argeș, especially).

### **The perspectives of sheep rearing using the organic system**

At this moment, much enthusiasm concerning the adoption of the organic system is recorded among the sheep owners. With the experience of the years 2004 - 2005, when supplementary subventions were granted for the practice of the organic farming covering the expenses with farms inspection and certification, we think that in the following 2 – 4 years, the future of the organic sheep rearing, and not only, will depend in large share by the MADR support.

We are based on this support, because the request for organic products was recorded on both internal and extern market, and correct orientation of ANSVSA within the general frame of the EU legislation will promote the local, manual processing, and maintaining of the farm market of food products and will give an impulse to this activity.

The improvement of the genuine sheep populations (Țigaie and Țurcană, especially) for milk production and adapting the technologies of exploit for increase the production of milk destined to market in the mean time with the improvement of the hygiene conditions by milk chain, will favorize this activity with tradition and great resources in Romania. With some more units for processing in our country, we estimate that the sheep effective maintained using organic managerial system could increase to 10% of total. The promotion of the organic sheep meat on the market is also needed.

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