

Analysis of Lesotho Wool Production and Quality Trends 2008-2018

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Abstract : Lesotho farmers produce significant quantities of Merino wool of a quality competitive on the global market and make a substantial impact on the economy of Lesotho. However, even with the economic contribution, the production and quality information and trends of this fibre has been recognised nor documented. This is a sombre shortcoming as Lesotho wool is unknown on international markets. The situation is worsened by the fact that Lesotho wool is auction together with South African wool, trading and benchmarking Lesotho wool are difficult not to mention attempts to advance its production and quality. Based on the information above, available data on Lesotho wool for 10 years were collected and analysed for trends to used in benchmarking where applicable. The fibre properties analysed include fibre diameter (fineness), vegetable matter and yield, application and price. These were selected because they are fundamental in determining fibre quality and price. Production of wool in Lesotho has increased slightly over the ten years covered by this study. It also became apparent that production and quality trends of Lesotho wool are greatly influenced by the farming practices, breed of sheep and climatic conditions. Greater adoption of the merino sheep breed, sheds/barns and sheep coats are suggested as ways to reduce mortality rate (due to extremely cold temperatures), to reduce the vegetable matter on the fibre thus improving the quality and increase yield per sheep and production as a whole. Some farming practices such as the lack of barns, supplementary feeding and veterinary care present constraints in wool production. The districts in the Highlands region were found to have the highest production of mostly wool, this being ascribed to better pastures, climatic, social and other conditions conducive to wool production. The production of Lesotho wool and its quality can be improved further, possibly because of the interventions the Ministry of Agriculture introduced through the Small Agricultural and Development Project (SADP) and other appropriate initiatives by the National Wool and Mohair Growers Association (NWMGA). The challenge however, remains the lack of direct involvement of the wool growers (farmers) in decisions making and policy development, this potentially influences and may lead to the reluctance to adopt the strategies. In some cases, the wool growers do not receive the benefits associated with the interventions immediately. Based on these discoveries; it is recommended that the relevant educators and researchers in wool and textile science, as well as the local wool farmers in Lesotho, be represented in policy and other decision making forums relating to these interventions. In this way, educational campaigns and training workshops will be demand driven with a better chance of adoption and success. This is because the direct beneficiaries will have been involved at inception and they will have a sense of ownership as well as intent to see them through successfully.

Keywords : lesotho wool, wool quality, wool production, lesotho economy, global market, apparel wool, database, textile science, exports, animal farming practices, intimate apparel, interventions

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