

DORPER SHEEP AND THE PRODUCTION OF LEAN LAMB IN ARID AUSTRALIA



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Executive Summary

The Dorper sheep was developed from a Blackhead Persian ewe and a Dorset Horn ram after the 1930s in the harsh dry regions of South Africa. This sheep was required to fill the need for an animal that could produce a desirable carcass for the South African market. The resultant sheep has become a hardy adaptable animal eminently suitable for the arid regions of South Africa and Namibia and has proved that it can adapt to all environments around the world.

The Dorper has proved that it can replace traditional uneconomical livestock industries anywhere and this is especially evident in Namibia where the Dorper has almost completely taken over from the Karakul Sheep Industry where the lambs were killed for their skins. From these changes in the industry, international Dorper breeding businesses are now conducted virtually from the Kalahari Desert. In South Africa the Dorper replaced the existing Meat Sheep Industry after its development in the 1930s and now very few other sheep breeds are grazed on the vast open plains of western South Africa.

The Australian Pastoral and Grazing Industries 'rode on the Merino sheep's back' for the best part of a century. However, it can be argued that this is no longer the case. Many farmers in Australia have been looking for an alternative enterprise to wool since the demise of the Reserve Price Scheme. Since 1996, farmers have been importing Dorper genetics and since then these sheep have been spreading across the country. In more recent years large-scale lamb producing enterprises using Dorpers have been developed in the more arid areas of Australia. This movement combined with rising lamb prices and the scarcity of sheep has injected a new sense of a future into the bush.

Breeders of Dorpers and the White Dorpers focus on fertility, conformation, masculinity and femininity to ensure that Dorpers can be the basis for a productive and economical Lamb Producing Industry. These factors—combined with the Dorper's low maintenance requirements such as shearing, crutching, lice treatment and mulesing with minimal feed requirements—have the capacity to rejuvenate pastoral industries across the arid regions of Australia.

The Dorper has proved that it can produce a carcass equal to the best in the world and is now sought out by abattoirs, the conventional lamb market and the certified organic market. Due to the low maintenance requirements of Dorpers, the breed lends itself well to fill the organic market without any special management requirements. In Namibia the industry has virtually a state imposed system of certified organic product. This is at least in part to protect its EU accreditation and export market and is heavily regulated with farmers being subjected to severe penalties for infringements.

The Dorper industry of Namibia and South Africa has a well-developed structure of education and training available for interested people. Young people routinely access the training courses to prepare themselves for careers in the Dorper Lamb producing Industry. The Fellow was able to partake in a senior course conducted at Beaufort Wes by the South African Dorper Society. The courses are quite intense and only the very best Dorper people pass. Structured courses of this type do not exist in Australia. Those interested wanting to undertake such courses either have to wait for trainers to visit from overseas or travel to South Africa.