

### **Perspectives of small ruminants in the Mediterranean part of Croatia**

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The sheep rearing has a long tradition in Croatia. The small ruminants' population and their economic importance have been significantly changed during the past 60 years. Industry and tourism development have led to significant decline of small ruminants population. The total sheep and goat population is around 650 and 78 thousand animals currently, reared on 23 thousand farms. Around 60% of sheep and 45% of goat population is reared in Mediterranean part of Croatia. Sheep production of this area is based on autochthonous breeds, extensive pasture, and crop production systems. These breeds are used for meat (primarily lamb) and milk production. Milk is mainly used for cheese production either traditionally in small family dairies or industrially in large dairies however in a smaller extent. Wool production has not any economic importance, since only a small proportion is processed by the domestic textile industry and unfortunately most of the wool ends as a waste. The most population of goats consists of indigenous breeds, mainly kept in Mediterranean region. Goat farming has a large importance since they are adapted to weaker conditions for breeding in comparison to other livestock species. The most part of Croatian goat population is reared for meat. The increase of small ruminants' population should be one of the goals in Croatian Mediterranean area not only for economic but also environmental reasons (fire prevention). Production covers only 50% demands on small ruminants' meat in Croatia. Also, demands on local sheep and goat types of cheeses are steadily increasing. For future development of sheep and goat sector, the most important measures are: use of funds available to farmers within the Program of rural development (EFRD), to increase production on existing farms as well as to build new farms. Furthermore, younger and educated people have to be included in this production. Protection of local products by quality designations (marks of quality) also will help in their recognition on the market.

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