

THE STATE AND CHALLENGES OF SHEEP FARMING IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

In the years of independence, Uzbekistan has implemented economic reforms and achieved significant results in the sheep farming sector. Through market relations, privatization, and the establishment of modern farms, the country has secured a leading position in the global production of Karakul products. The local Karakul breed stands out with its unique wool and fleece, enhancing its competitiveness. However, shortages of financial resources and raw materials have decreased production efficiency. Government programs are focused on improving water supply for pastures and strengthening the material and technical base. In conclusion, sheep farming is a crucial sector of the Uzbek economy, playing a decisive role in strengthening the agricultural sector and increasing foreign currency earnings.

Keywords: sheep farming, privatization, wool, fleece, meat, export, infrastructure, production, natural resources, foreign investments.

Introduction

In the years of independence, profound reforms were implemented in all sectors of the economy. In particular, market relations were formed in agriculture, the transition to non-state forms of ownership occurred, and measures for privatization and the release of property from state control were carried out. According to the decision No. 137 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated March 15, 1993, all collective farms engaged in livestock farming were privatized, and farmers' households were established. These reforms were also implemented in the sheep farming sector, which is a crucial component of livestock farming. Sheep farming is one of the oldest branches of livestock farming in Central Asia. Uzbekistan ranks among the leading countries in the world in the production of sheep farming products. The main products of sheep farming in Uzbekistan include its excellent wool, tasty meat, and fleece. Uzbekistan has a sharply changing climate, with nearly 25 million hectares of its total land area, or 56.7 percent, consisting of deserts, steppes, and natural pastures. The local breed of Karakul sheep, which has been formed over centuries, is valuable not only for its unique product, the Karakul skins, but also for its adaptation to the harsh local climate and pasture conditions. Uzbek Karakul sheep have long been exported and play a significant role in increasing foreign currency earnings for the country through international markets and auctions. The sheep farming sector holds a special place in the structure of agriculture. Products from sheep farming account for 11 percent of the total income from agriculture in the Republic¹. The sheep farming sector plays a crucial role as a factor that allows for the economic development of desert areas and significantly influences the lives and living standards of the 2.3 million people residing in this region. Its products serve as a source of foreign

¹ Nuraliyev J. Karakul skins – Uzbekistan's national wealth // Economy and Accounting. – 1998. – No. 2. – p. 31



currency. In Uzbekistan's sheep farming industry, there are 124 specialized farms, including 18 breeding farms, 13 breeding enterprises, and 93 commodity farms. Additionally, the Bukhara Karakul Plant, the Keles Wool Washing Factory, and 10 specialized breeding complexes contribute to the industry. A total of 650,000 workers, including more than 130,000 specialists, are involved in its development². The Karakul sheep breed was created through folk selection, and the Karakul skins produced from them are always highly valued in the global wool market for their beauty and tightness, as well as their varied colors. However, the sheep farming sector is not only a source of Karakul skins, which are its main product, but also serves as a basis for producing meat, wool, and leather products at low costs. The experience of developing deserts and rationally utilizing their natural resources has shown that breeding Karakul sheep is the only economically viable method for effective use of the resources of desert regions. The development of sheep farming is a socio-economic issue and has become one of the priority areas for deepening and advancing economic reforms in the sector. In the years of independence, efforts were made to improve the quality of Karakul sheep. For this purpose, 20 high-quality breeding rams, originally from the Karakul sheep breed that had migrated to Afghanistan during the Bukhara Emirate period, were brought from Afghanistan to Navoi to establish the production of high-quality red Karakul skins³. In 1992, a branch of the Bukhara Karakul Skin Processing Plant was opened in the city of Nurata. That same year, a finished clothing workshop was also launched at the plant. In the first six months of 1992, the workshop produced 692 pieces of headwear for both women and men. Additionally, the workshop began producing women's coats made from Karakul skins. However, along with these achievements, there were also shortcomings. The raw materials workshop fulfilled 80.2 percent of its plan for skin processing and only 59 percent for skin sorting. Similar issues were observed in the dyeing workshop. Such shortcomings led to a decrease in the plant's skin sales. In 1992, skin sales accounted for only 33.5 percent compared to 1991. Due to the rising prices of Karakul skins, contracts signed with buyers at the beginning of the year were not fulfilled, further complicating the plant's financial situation. The plant paid a total of 115 million soums to the farms supplying skins, while debts exceeded 450 million soums⁴. On January 31, 1992, the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted decree No. 31, and on March 2, 1992, the "Karakul" Production Association issued order No. 17 to establish a special commission on labor protection, aimed at improving specialists' qualifications, creating appropriate working conditions, preventing accidents, and strengthening fire safety measures. A regulation was also approved regarding the activities of the commission. The regulation outlined the scope of the commission's work and its rights, as well as guidelines for organizing the commission's activities⁵. In Uzbekistan, the number of farms specializing in sheep farming was 82 in 1991, and this number increased to 124 by 1999. However, during this period, the population of Karakul sheep decreased from 3.4 million to 2.4 million, while skin production fell from 802,000 to 493,000⁶. The main

² Saidqulov B. The Karakul industry in Uzbekistan and its future development // Materials of the international scientific-practical conference "Problems of Pasture Livestock and Desert Ecology". – Samarkand, 2000. – pp. 5-7.

³ Field Notes: Yusupov Maxsud Gulamovich – Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources, Department Head (August 2016).

⁴ Bukhara VDA, Fund 498, List 1, Case 336, Pages 155-158.

⁵ Bukhara VDA, Fund 498, List 1, Case 336, Page 114.

⁶ Sherov J.A. Priority directions for the future development of sheep farming in Uzbekistan. Materials of the international scientific-practical conference "Problems of Pasture Livestock and Desert Ecology". – Samarkand, 2000. – pp. 146-148.



reason for this situation is attributed to the extremely low level of development of production, economic-social, and market infrastructures. In the early years of independence, issues such as increasing the number of Karakul sheep, improving breeding practices, increasing the quantity of products produced, and adapting their quality to meet export standards and global market demands accumulated over time. Additionally, the application of economic reforms in farms, the widespread implementation of scientific advancements in the sector, and the improvement of shepherds' social conditions were problems awaiting solutions. In a market economy, establishing a strong material and technical base for the further development and progress of the sheep farming sector became a pressing issue. This, in turn, required attracting foreign investment to further develop the sector. The government set the following measures for conducting economic reforms in the field. To stabilize sheep farming in the face of harsh natural climate conditions, a state program to support sheep farming was developed, which included improving the provision of pastures with water, allowing farms to utilize the grain products produced in sheep farming areas, and primarily cultivating feed varieties of grain. The main product of the sheep farming sector is high-quality Karakul skins, which necessitates proper breeding practices, selection, sorting, and the correct organization of artificial insemination. To improve this branch of livestock farming within the framework of ongoing reforms in Uzbekistan, it became essential to enhance the organizational management system of the sector, improve the condition of pastures in regions where Karakul skins are produced, ensure water supply, cultivate and expand feed and pasture plants, and develop specialized farms for Karakul sheep that also focus on crop farming, particularly grain farming aimed at seed production. There was also a need to strengthen state support for the Bukhara Karakul Plant. Annually, nearly half a million Karakul skins are produced in the Republic, of which only about 100,000 are delivered to the Bukhara Karakul Plant. However, due to insufficient payment funds from the plant, the debts from farms continued to increase⁷. In 1996, 90.5 percent of the total Karakul skins produced in the republic and sold to the "Bukhara-Karakul" joint-stock company came from farms belonging to the "Uzkarakul" association. In the republic, the share of products delivered to the "Bukhara-Karakul" joint-stock company was 66.3 percent in 1993, 28.4 percent in 1994, and 20.9 percent in 1995. In 1997, farms signed contracts to deliver 276,600 Karakul skins to the "Bukhara-Karakul" joint-stock company, and as of September 1, 1997, they had supplied 163,400 skins, which is 59.1 percent of the amount specified in the contract⁸. In the years of independence, the economic reforms implemented in Uzbekistan, particularly in the sheep farming sector, were of significant importance. Through the formation of market relations, privatization, and the establishment of modern farms, the country has secured a leading position in the global production of Karakul products. The local Karakul breed is distinguished by its unique wool and fleece. However, problems in other sectors, financial constraints, and shortages of raw materials have reduced production efficiency. Government programs aimed at developing sheep farming require improvements in water supply for pastures and the strengthening of the material and technical base of farms. In conclusion, sheep farming is a crucial sector of the Uzbek economy, playing a decisive role in strengthening the agricultural sector and increasing foreign currency earnings for the country.

⁷ Bozorov R. Karakul – a gem // Society and Management. – Tashkent, 1998. – No. 4. – pp. 26-36.

⁸ Bozorov R. Karakul – a gem // Society and Management. – Tashkent, 1998. – No. 4. – pp. 26-36.



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