

Cashmere

Bruce McGregor

Introduction

Australian production of cashmere is valued at approximately \$0.5 million per annum. Cashmere-producing goats also benefit pasture, help to control many weeds, and produce premium goat meat.

Australian-grown cashmere has been sold on international markets since 1982. Like the mohair industry, the cashmere industry has established marketing and processing infrastructure. To increase exports of cashmere, more farmers and more farmed goats are needed. Cashmere production could increase in most areas and the challenge is to get goats onto farms.

Readers are referred to the chapter on mohair for advice on weed control using goats, pasture management and for general husbandry matters. This chapter contains additional information relevant only to the cashmere industry.

Cashmere is the premier soft-handling, luxury fibre. Demand usually far exceeds the current world production of about 4500 t, of which 2500 t come from China and 1150 t from Mongolia. While cashmere prices do fluctuate

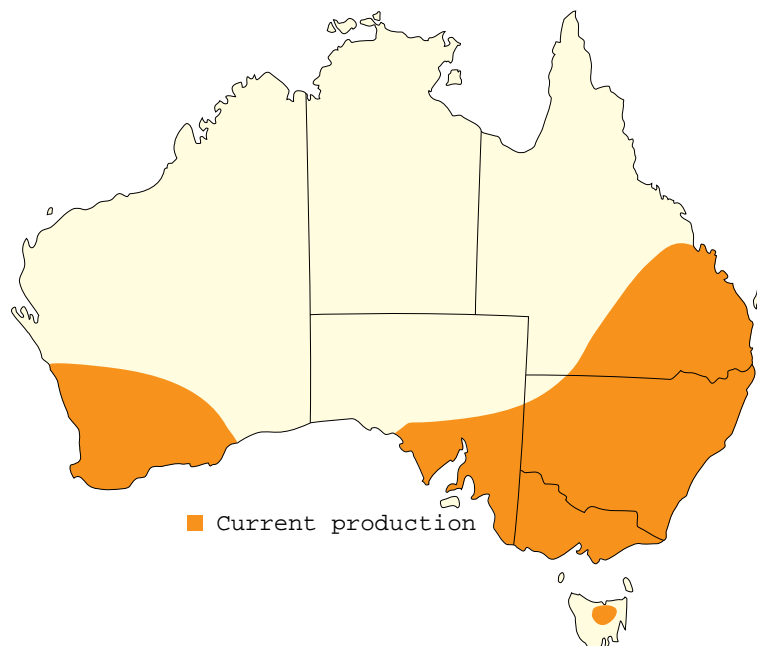
with fashion changes, they rose faster than inflation between the 1950s and 1989, while the real prices of wool have fallen relative to inflation.

The Australian cashmere industry has received orders from Europe and from China for 1000 t of cashmere annually, but currently produces only about 20 t. The cashmere industry is well organised, has one industry-owned marketing structure, has excellent contacts with overseas processors, and has had excellent scientific and technological research to direct its development. The main constraint is that there are too few animals on the farm producing too little cashmere per head.

Fleeces from cashmere goats contain coarse hair, which has no commercial value, and a fine soft undercoat, or down. It is this fine down which is called cashmere. A small number of goats grow down which is not suitable for sale as cashmere and these goats are culled for meat production.

Markets and marketing issues

Australian cashmere is sold via a tender system based on objective measurements of the fibre. The selling system is operated by the industry-owned Australian Cashmere Marketing Corporation. Most cashmere is exported in the raw state to Europe, USA



and China where initial processing is done. The dehaired cashmere may then be spun and made into fabrics in other locations. Several Australian manufacturers have purchased fibre and produced knitwear for local consumption and export.

About the author



Bruce McGregor is a Senior Animal Scientist. Since 1977 his extensive research and advisory programs have developed scientifically based practical management recommendations for mohair, cashmere and goat-meat production in non-tropical regions of Australia.

Major markets for finished cashmere textiles are Europe, Japan and the USA. China is rapidly developing its cashmere manufacturing sector and is now the main exporter of cashmere textiles. As a consequence, less raw cashmere is being traded. This trend will accelerate and increase demand for Australian cashmere.

Prices of cashmere are related to mean fibre diameter and fibre

colour. In 1996 white cashmere < 16 μm brought \$90/kg clean cashmere down, coarser white and lightly coloured cashmere realised \$70 to \$80/kg clean down and brown and grey cashmere sold for \$55/kg down.

Production requirements

See chapter on mohair. As cashmere goats generally have much shorter fleeces than mohair-producing goats they are less likely to become entangled in scrub during weed-control programs. This allows them to be used longer for that purpose.

Breeds

Cashmere is produced by commercially farmed 'Australian cashmeres' and by feral goats. It is possible to purchase feral goats (50 to 80 g cashmere per year) and domesticate them but it is now far easier to purchase domesticated and more productive 'bred-on' cashmeres (120 to 200 g cashmere per year). Established breeders now have

fifth-generation selected cashmeres for sale with production as high as 300 g cashmere per year.

It is best to plan your purchases in advance by arranging to buy goats from established breeders. Currently many potential fibre-producing and breeding goats are slaughtered for meat. Goats are not usually sold in sheep and cattle markets. Specific goat auctions are held at major shows.

Key messages

- E International markets want more product
- E Selling products through marketing system for 15 years
- E Large benefits in weed control
- E Established small industry with informed association
- E Excellent technical information available



Yearling bucks growing cashmere at a leading Australian stud.

Table 1. Gross margin returns (GM) from cashmere (Davies and Murray 1997)

Enterprise	GM perhead	GM perDSE ^a	GM per\$100 of livestock capital
Cashmere (8 years of selection)	\$26.77	\$11.79	\$103
Cashmere (eral flock in 2nd year)	\$16.50	\$ 7.27	\$ 64

^a DSE = dry sheep equivalent, the feed required for a 45 kg Merino wether.

Key statistics

Products	1995/96 Value \$ million	
	Production	Exports
Cashmere	0.5	0.5 ^a

^a Some cashmere is locally consumed and some of the exports are processed.

Animal husbandry and disease control

See chapter on mohair.

Harvesting, handling and marketing requirements

Cashmere goats are shorn once a year in midwinter. Delays in shearing will result in the valuable cashmere down being moulted by the goats and lost or cotted, with a resultant loss of income. During shearing, contamination of white fibre with coloured fibre must be avoided. Shed hygiene standards

should be followed. See also chapter on mohair.

Economics of production

Stud goats may cost from \$250 per head but commercial-fibre goats can be purchased from about \$25 per head. If fencing is required capital inputs will be greater, and this is best undertaken when fencing on a property is already run down. Returns on capital vary from about 0% when significant capital is required to about 40% per annum when benefits arise from weed control.

Key contacts

Industry Association:
Australia Cashmere Growers Association Ltd
30 Cann Street
Guildford, NSW 2161
Phone: (02) 9632 7476
Fax: (02) 9632 5975
Email: cashmere@acga.asn.au

In each State the farmer associations have goat industry sections that can provide industry development contacts and information, consult your telephone directory.

Key references additional to those in chapter on mohair

Browne, R. J. (Ed.) 1990 *Cashmere Goats Notes* 2nd Edition, Australian Cashmere Growers Association, Guildford, NSW, 350 pp.

Davies, L. and Murray, G. 1997 *The Economics of a Commercial Cashmere Goat Enterprise* Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, Canberra.

Industry Journals

- *The Australian Goat Report* published fortnightly and *The Goat Farmer* magazine, phone 045 761 218.
- *Cashmere Australia* published by Australian Cashmere Growers Association Ltd.