S O U T H A F R I C A N W O O L S

A QUALITY PRODUCT FOR WORLD TEXTILE MARKETS

The South African wool industry provides a high-quality, environmentally-sound product which meets the needs of the textile industry. On-farm classing and clip preparation for greasy wool is of a high standard and is considered one of the many tangible assets of the industry. South African wool has, over the years, earned a reputation for uniformity, softness to the touch and other quality features.

First-stage processing in South Africa is modern and technologically sophisticated and provides the wool spinning industry with quality input materials to meet the most stringent requirements of the downstream textile processing sector.

WOOL INDUSTRY

EARLY HISTORY

The sheep and wool industry is one of the oldest agricultural industries in South Africa. It plays an important economic role as an earner of foreign exchange for the country.

Although carpet type wools have been produced in Northern Africa for centuries, the production of fine apparel types on the African continent only commenced with the arrival of the first Merino sheep at the Cape in 1789, and the subsequent establishment of the woolled sheep industry on a commercial basis under British colonial rule (1806 - 1910).

During the whole of its colonial period the Cape province remained the most important wool producing area in Southern Africa. Although the sheep industry spread rapidly throughout virtually the whole of the country during subsequent years, "Cape Wool" has become the international generic trade term for all wool produced on the sub-continent.

South African wool is largely an export commodity, in both processed or semi-processed form. It is produced and traded in a sophisticated free market business environment into the international marketplace, where supply and demand forces determine price levels.

ORGANISATIONS IN THE WOOL INDUSTRY

The organisations and business sectors involved in the South African wool industry are:

CAPE WOOLS SA
Tel : +27 41 484 4301
Fax : +27 41 484 6792
E-mail:
capewool@capewools.co.za
www.capewools.co.za

Cape Wools is a non-profit service company established and owned by wool farmers and other directly affected industry groups represented in the Wool Industry Forum of South Africa. Its service portfolio comprises information and statistics, research and development, extension services and training, and promotion.

South African Wool and Mohair Buyers' Association (SAWAMBA)
Tel : +27 41 4845252
Fax : +27 41 4845629
E-mail:
info@exchange-sa.co.za

Association representing the wool buying industry in South Africa. Most of the companies belonging to the Association have significant shareholding in local early stage scouring and combing facilities, or are associated with international wool trading houses.

Wool Testing Bureau of South Africa (Pty) Ltd
Tel : +27 41 503 6600
Fax : +27 41 583 2195
Email Address:
wian.heath@wtbsa.co.za

IWTO-accredited test house responsible for all independent objective measurement testing services to the trade.

Wool Textile Council
Tel : +27 41 4845252
Fax : +27 41 4845629
E-mail:
info@exchange-sa.co.za

The South African National Committee representing the buying, processing and exporting industry on the International Wool Textile Organisation (IWTO).

ORGANISATIONS IN THE WOOL INDUSTRY

Wool Buyers

A Dewavrin Freres (Pty) Ltd
Tel: +27-(0)-41-4844443
Fax: +27-(0)41-4843038
E-mail: jyoung@dewavrin.com

Beier Finance (Pty) Ltd
Tel: +27-(0)-41-31-9022233
Fax: +27-(0)-41-31-9027826
E-mail: beierwool@iafrica.com

Chargeurs Wools (SA) (Pty) Ltd
Tel: +27-(0)41-5810081
Fax: +27-(0)41-5810212
E-mail:
dgadzios@chargeurs-wool.com

Fibres International (Pty) Ltd
Tel: +27-(0)41-5033431
Fax: +27-(0)41-5033118
E-mail:
david.shingles@bkb.co.za

Modiano SA (Pty) Ltd
Tel: +27-(0)41-4846545/6
Fax: +27-(0)41-4841143
Email: modsa@modiano.co.za

New England Wool (SA)
Tel: +27-(0)41-3606788
Fax: +27-(0)41-5854827
E-mail:
ken@newenglandwoolsa.co.za

Segard Masurel (Pty) Ltd
Tel: +27-(0)41-3634844
Fax: +27-(0)41-3634855
E-mail:
wool@segardmasurel.co.za

SA Wool Exporters (Pty) Ltd
Tel +27-(0)-41-3654620
Fax +27-(0)-41-3654628
E-mail:
trading@standardwool.co.za

Stucken & Co (Pty) Ltd
Tel: +27-(0)41-3974700
Fax: +27-(0)41-3974735
E-mail: stucken@stucken.co.za
www.stucken.co.za

Wool Processors

Cape of Good Hope Wool Combers
Tel: +27-(0)41-9923412
Fax: +27-(0)41-9921519
E-mail:
rudolfo.arocena@cghwc.co.za

Gubb & Inggs Ltd
Tel: +27-(0)41-9947500
Fax: +27-(0)41-9922162
E-mail: geraldine@stucken.co.za
www.stucken.co.za

Beier Finance (Pty) Ltd
Tel: +27-(0)-41-31-9022233
Fax: +27-(0)-41-31-9027826
Email: beierwool@iafrica.com

Wool Brokers and Traders

BKB Ltd
Tel: +27-(0)41-5033111
Fax: +27-(0)41-5033112
E-mail: bkb@bkb.co.za
www.bkb.co.za

Cape Mohair and Wool (CMW)
Tel: +27-(0)41-4861143
Fax: +27-(0)41-4861325
E-mail: info@cmw.co.za
www.cmw.co.za

Van Lill Woolbuyers Trust (CC)
Tel: +27-(0)41-4861237
Fax: +27-(0)41-4861238
Email: marina@vanlill.com

Junior Steenkamp - Wool & Mohair
Tel: +27-(0)41-4511104
Fax: +27-(0)41-4511207
E-mail: wcwm@lantic.net

Lanata (Pty) Ltd Wool/Mohair Broker
Tel: +27-(0)41-922-1419
Fax: +27-(0)41-922-1419
E-mail: lanata@intekom.co.za

Bruce, Lappersonne & Saunders
Tel: +27-(0)41-4511201
Fax: +27-(0)41-4511207
E-mail: wcwm@lantic.net

Woolgrower Organisation

National Woolgrowers' Association of SA (NWGA)
Tel: +27-(0)41-3655030
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E-mail: nwga@nwga.co.za
www.nwga.co.za

WOOL PRODUCTION

Production areas and woolled sheep breeds

Wool is produced in most parts of South Africa under either extensive, semi-extensive or intensive conditions. The carrying capacity of the wool producing areas varies from 5 to 10 hectares per small stock unit in the more arid areas, to 25 small stock units per hectare on cultivated pastures. Depending on climate and topography, most woolgrowers in the country of whom the majority also produce other commodities such as grain and meat.

The sheep breed with the highest wool production per head in South Africa is the pure-bred Merino, followed by other dual-purpose Merino strains, of which the Dohne Merino, the South African Mutton Merino and the Letelle are the most popular.

Dual purpose breeds are farmed with the specific aim of maximising wool and mutton income, since they have a longer body frame than the Merino but produce slightly less wool per kg of body weight. However, with regard to the quality of wool produced, there is little difference. Average Merino fleece weights vary from 4 - 5 kg per shear from sheep farmed in the semi-arid regions, to up to 8 kg per shear from sheep grazing on cultivated pastures.

Woolled sheep breeders in South Africa are well-organised in official breed societies. These are well aware aware of the dangers of black fibre and kemp contamination and breed standards require the absence of black and coloured fibres and kemp before animals are allowed on the registers of these societies.

More than 50% of the clip is produced in two provinces, namely the Eastern Cape and the Free State. Historically, wool produced in the neighbouring states of Namibia and Lesotho has always been considered part of the South African production and has always been sold in South Africa.

Composition of the clip

The South African wool clip is predominantly a Merino clip but coarse and coloured types are also produced and marketed on a limited scale.

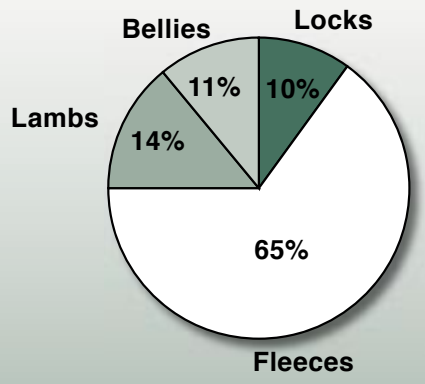
Between 65% and 70% of the clip comprises fleece wools, with the balance being locks, belly wools and lambs. About 50% qualifies for the most sought after styles, namely good topmaking, best topmaking and spinners styles.

Cape wools are high yielding, with more than 60% of the clip yielding at least 60% clean. Seed contamination is limited, with more than 80% of the clip normally exhibiting very low levels (2% or less).

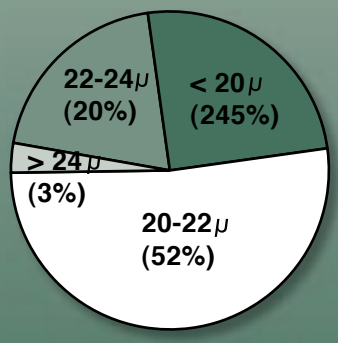
Micron, length/strength and colour

The fibre diameter ranges from 18 - 27 micron with more than 80% of the clip finer than 24 micron. Since a large percentage of woolgrowers have a mixed farming operation, not all flocks are shorn only once annually, and three shearings every two years is quite common. Shearing strategies are flexible and producers can react very quickly to market signals. Long wools (60 mm and above) normally comprise more than 65% of the clip, while shorter qualities, ideally suited to the fine woollen apparel trade, are freely available throughout the season.

Composition



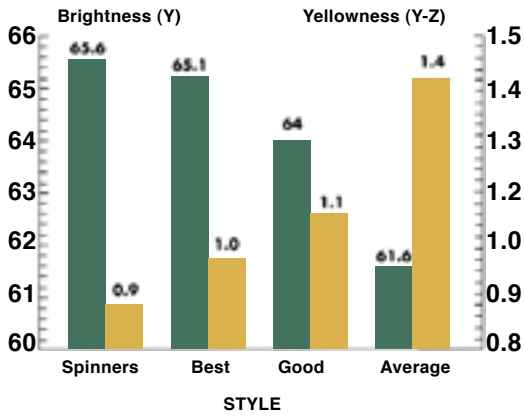
Micron (μ)



Cape Merino Wools have excellent colour characteristics, and fleeces normally measure between 60 and 69 Y-units on the brightness scale. Corresponding yellowness values (Y-Z) are very low, varying between 0 and 2 units.

The incidence of tender wool in the clip is limited due to sound farm management practices, which are aimed at minimising fleece "shock" during, for example, lambing, and providing adequate supplementary feed during droughts which occur fairly regularly in South Africa. Fleece wool consignments rarely fall below 40N/ktex staple strength, since any tender wools are rigorously skirted out and packed separately on the farm.

Average Colour Spectrum of Cape Wools



Clip Preparation

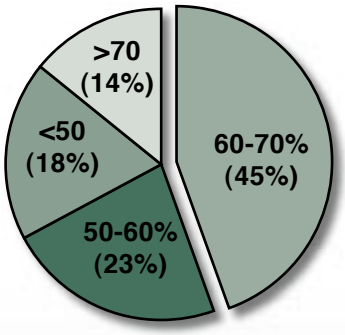
Cape Wools have over the years built up an enviable reputation as extremely well-classed and well-prepared for the market. Evenness within lines is the major criterium in this regard, with the proper balance between "overclassing" (ie too many lines) and "underclassing" (large but mixed lines) always being the driving force.

Consequently, great emphasis is continuously placed on the preparation of clips strictly in accordance with trade requirements. In practical terms this means classing on the farm on the basis of a Code of Practice for Clip Preparation prepared by Cape Wools SA and updated when appropriate. The Code of Practice is embodied in a set of standards that was a legal requirement up to 1996, when the market was deregulated with the promulgation of a new act which repealed the single desk marketing of agricultural products in South Africa.

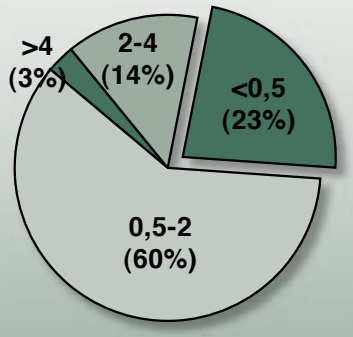
Training courses in the correct procedures for classing are held on a regular basis. The majority of wool producers are well trained in classing, clip preparation and shearing shed procedures, and all shorn wool is classed with meticulous care.

Strict precautionary measures to guard against contamination of wool during growing, shearing and packing have been instituted as an integral part of the marketing process. The Wool Textile Council plays an important role through the policing of the quality of packs imported by traders for distribution to growers.

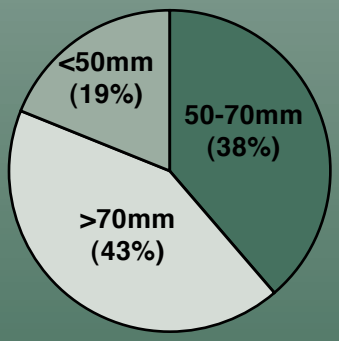
Clean Yield %



VM Fault %



Staple Length



WOOL PROCESSING INDUSTRY

Wool scouring and combing has been part of the South African wool scene for a very long time, the first scouring mill dating back to 1820. Through the years scouring and combing has developed into a primary processing industry which today is known world-wide for its efficiency and cost effectiveness. Tops and scoureds (snow whites) are of high quality and are keenly priced. Cape wools (greasy or semi-processed) are shipped across the world, with the majority of clients based in Europe and in the Far East.

The South African scouring and combing industry is capable of processing a significant proportion of the annual greasy wool production. The bulk of the clip is exported in either greasy or semi-processed form. The early stage processing capacity is situated in Port Elizabeth and in Durban.

All the local mills are associated with a major local trading house or a topmaker, but in addition also offer scouring, carbonizing and combing services on a commission basis to any client trading in raw wool on the local market. This sector of the industry is very progressive in terms of continuous upgrades of equipment and regular capital investments in terms of advanced technology for improved processing and effluent management programmes.

MARKETING

Cape wools are traded either through the auction system or by private treaty. The largest percentage of the clip is sold through the auction system. Auctions have been centralised in Port Elizabeth and take place once a week during the season (August to June). Even though centrally auctioned (i e sale by separation), wools are warehoused in three of the four ports, viz Port Elizabeth, Cape Town and Durban.

Prices paid for Cape wools are determined by free market supply and demand forces and are closely linked to the international price for apparel wool, which is determined by the Australian market.

Most of the clip is marketed overseas through members of SAWAMBA. Only registered members of that organisation are allowed to bid at auctions held under the auspices of the South African Wool Exchange.

Dumping and shipping

South African ports are situated conveniently on one of the major shipping lanes between East and West.

High-density presses (dumps) are used at all three ports of discharge. These dumps allow for compressing bales into a third of their original size, making it possible to pack 96 bales into a 6 m container. The average bale mass is 150 kg and dumping is carried out on a pre-sale basis.

All greasy and semi-processed wool destined for the export market is containerised and Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Durban are served by an efficient container shipping service to Europe, America and the Far East. Average on-board time to these destinations are 17 - 22 days, 30 days or 32 days, respectively.

Objective measurement and certification

Virtually the entire South African clip is tested and certified by the Wool Testing Bureau of South Africa (WTB) for mean fibre diameter, vegetable matter content and clean yield in accordance with procedures laid down by IWTO. Colour measurement is also offered to sellers and buyers.

Length and strength testing is available as an option for producers who wish to have their clips additionally measured, or for exporters who wish to conduct post-sale testing.

The WTB is an autonomous private company and also offers fleece testing and textile testing services. All in-house procedures are calibrated routinely against internationally prescribed norms and procedures and WTB issued certificates are accepted all over the world. It also plays an active supporting role in the valuation of improved test methods for greasy wool in collaboration with test houses in Australia and New Zealand.

CAPE WOOLS: USES & POTENTIAL

Because of the availability of a wide range of microns and staple lengths, Cape wools can be processed into a large and diverse range of fine wool apparel products on either the worsted, semi-worsted or the woollen system. Due to their inherent high staple strength, low within-sale-lot variation in staple length and low VM content, combing fleeces produce excellent tops characterised by low short fibre values and low CV (%) of Hauteur values. Wool exporters are highly skilled in designing appropriate blends to meet client specifications for a wide range of intermediate products.

The good fibre diameter and fibre length distribution characteristics in top form makes it possible for these wools to be spun into any conceivable commercial yarn count required by the apparel industry. Because of its softness of handle, Cape wools are ideally suited for modern, soft against the skin products in fabric or knitwear.

Because of rigid classing and woolshed preparation procedures on the farm, the occurrence of stained or pigmented fibre in fleece lines is low, making Cape wools also eminently suitable for the pastel trade. The bright, white fibre base colour of Cape wools provides an ideal substrate to provide the full palette of fashion shades required by the industry.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

The principle of integrated quality management from farm to container is keenly supported and continuously developed by all sectors of the trade. ISO-based accreditation systems are promoted at all levels, with the aim to continuously monitor and upgrade quality standards in line with market requirements.

According to the Agricultural and Stock Remedies Act of South Africa, it is a criminal offense to use any product not registered with the Department of Agriculture. Offensive products such as organochlorine paracitisides and arsenic-based compounds have all be banned in South Africa, in line with modern international trends in other countries.

Special effort is also made at farm level to educate growers in the correct treatment of ectoparasites on sheep in order to reduce toxic residues in wool grease to within internationally accepted limits, thereby minimising the environmental impact of wool production and reducing the potential risks regarding product safety.

Reduction and elimination of black (pigmented) or stained fibres, or medullated fibres such as kemp which might occur from time to time in some clips as a result of changes in short-term breeding policies, are the focus of continuous and intensive on-farm breeding and classing advisory services. The quality of Cape wools in this regard has always been considered a tangible asset to be protected at all times. To create ongoing awareness among producers of the problems and consequences of contamination, especially from foreign fibres such as baling twine and from other gross contamination, the producers of Cape Wools are exposed to on-going anti-contamination programmes.

The Code of Practice for Clip Preparation includes strict measures for shearing shed management and quality assurance procedures on the farm to avoid any unwanted material entering the wool in the bale, and ongoing shearer training courses are also structured around shed management procedures to ensure clip quality.

The Wool Testing Bureau contributes significantly to the quality assurance programme for Cape wools. Core samples submitted for OM testing are routinely screened for traces of contamination. Should this happen, appropriate measures are automatically taken to rectify the matter.

Cape wools are grown with a keen awareness not only of the environment, but also of ethical issues such as animal welfare. Growers are continuously informed about developments regarding the importance of incorporating animal health issues in the overall on-farm quality assurance management programmes.

OUR ETHICS REGARDING ANIMAL WELFARE

The South African woolgrower is a stockman with a keen appreciation of animal husbandry and how to care for his animals and the environment. Resource-based conservation is a high priority and the "clean green" approach is a natural business ethic. Internal and external stock remedies are used sparingly and only when there is no alternative.

The result is a healthy, well-adapted national flock that thrives in the natural environment.

As far as mulesing is concerned, this is not a widespread procedure here, with perhaps only a fraction of one per cent of all sheep being subjected to this operation. There are a number of reasons for this:

• The South African Merino has, over the years, been bred for less skin folds (a "smoother" body conformation), so that there is less wool growth in the animal's breech area.

• The average flock size in South Africa is considerably smaller than in Australia. Labour is less costly and more readily available. Consequently, the South African woolgrower can give much more individual attention to his flock and take preventative steps to avoid flystrike.

• It is common practice amongst SA woolgrowers to shear the breech area of the sheep approximately halfway through the growth cycle to the fleece. This is called "crutching" and eliminates the moist, woolly environment where blowfly can flourish.

• Should it become apparent that there is evidence of flystrike in a flock, a quick, localised application of pesticide to the breech area to kill the blowfly is standard practice. These products are all registered in terms of appropriate legislation (Act 36 of 1947).

• The largest proportion of the South African wool clip is from harsh, low-rainfall areas (for example the Karoo), where blowfly is not as prevalent as in higher rainfall areas such as the coastal belt and the Highveld.