

Workshop European Livestock Breeds Ark and Rescue Net
working group "Marketing of Products and Services"
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“Wool products of the rare sheep breeds: Promotion of the breeds and added value”

Presentation of ATELIER and its activities

ATELIER (in English it means "workshop") is made into French with the first letters of the following words "European Association for Study, Liaison, Innovation and Research into Textiles".

It was founded 19 years ago with the aim of developing cooperation between people wishing to promote and upgrade wool as a natural material and to make it once again an element of local development.

Its members - breeders, shearers, processors, designers, scientists ,... - work with wool, mohair, angora and other animal fibres, mostly in less favoured regions. The association was launched in France but has gradually spread to other European countries.

ATELIER's central idea is to restore cooperation between all the links of the wool chain and to promote wool as a natural and renewable fibre to the consumers.

Exhibitions: Three itinerant exhibitions “From sheep shearing to the finished product”, “Wool types of Europe” and “Wool” are presented in schools, agricultural shows, craft fairs or museums. Through photos, texts, numerous samples of wool and finished products, as well as demonstrations, the visitors learn about the diversity of sheep breeds, the production process and the many different possibilities of how to use wool.

Training courses: ATELIER members offer a wide range of highly diverse development courses: sheep shearing, wool grading, dyeing, felting, weaving, general know how on wool... Courses are offered to farmers on how to transmit basis knowledge on wool processing to groups of children visiting their farms.

Documentation centre: An EU programme called ARQUEOTEX made it possible to open a documentation centre in 1998. Here we collect books, magazines, technical reviews and other documentation on wool and sheep, as well as wool samples and finished products of more than 100 different European sheep breeds. The centre is used by schools, students, museums...

Video films, website: In the framework of the same ARQUEOTEX programme, we produced three video films, one for the general public, "Wool and Man", and two for a more specialized public, "How to obtain a quality wool fleece" and "Wool in Europe, a living heritage". The three films are now put together on a single DVD. The website of ATELIER in French and English (the English version is updated less frequently) presents its members and their activities as well as a calendar of events in the fields of sheep breeding, wool and textiles: exhibitions, fairs, conferences, training courses. There you can also find a list of second-hand weaving looms and wool processing machines. Through the website, ATELIER receives a lot of demands.

Meetings and conferences: At the end of September 2007, ATELIER organised "Wool in the Home", a European meeting in France at the Ecocentre du Périgord, a centre for training courses and demonstration of ecological building. There were two days of professional discussions about all ways of using wool in the home - mattresses, blankets, insulation, tapestries, interior decoration, fabrics, carpets and rugs, felt works - between producers and users, architects, home decorators... The third day, an exhibition of all these products was opened to the public and two of the ecological buildings of the Ecocentre fitted out with wool items.

Presentation of the European Wool Group

ATELIER has gradually expanded the scope of its European contacts. It is one of the founders of the "European Wool Group". Here representatives of the most important sheep breeders' organisations in Europe come together. The main aim of the EWG is to convince the European institutions to accord structural aid in order to promote the interests of wool produced in Europe. The EWG has also set up a pool of information of the whole European wool sector.

The European Wool Group was officially founded in May 1997 in Brussels. Since then, many conferences, tours and visits have been organised. In October 2004, the year of the entrance in the EU of the East European countries, a conference took place in the Czech Republic, "Wool of Europe, East and West", in order to establish contacts and cooperation between the old and the new EU-countries. At this occasion, a shearing course was organised for young Czech farmers with one instructor of the British Wool Marketing Board and one of the French shearers' association.

A meeting on "Wool scouring in Europe: regional and ecological projects" was held in Germany in May 2005. Modern wool scouring plants are too big to be able to process small lots. Sheep farmers and sheep breeders' associations met with representatives of scouring plants and equipment manufacturers with the aim of finding solutions for small quantities of wool.

Breeding and wool

Breeding is a quite ancient human activity and the creation of the domestic animal breeds is the product of a long and patient work of selection by men in the course of the millenniums. Each breed results from an adaptation to its environment, to the soils and the climates. It tends towards optimal use of the natural resources and has developed original specific methods of breeding: transhumance, extensive pastures, mountain pastures... In sheep breeding, the selection process gave us various rustic breeds but during the last 40 years, there were an invasion of cross breeds and a lot of these local breeds are disappearing. Wool promotion and marketing of wool products could help the different initiatives for the conservation of these breeds.

At the European level, were published in 2003 the new European regulations *on the protection of geographical indications and designation of origin for agricultural products and foodstuffs* (692/2003). Wool has been included in the list of agricultural products that may profit from this kind of protection.

Some examples of initiatives

Support, by the National Trust (Great Britain), of the wool products made with the Herdwick breed in Cumbria (carpets and others) after the foot and mouth disease

Processing, by the Filature de Chantemerle (France), of wool from the breed "Solognot" in fabric, socks,..., on behalf of the Flock Book of the breed, for the promotion of the breed by mode shows and Television programme

Processing, by the Piacenza company in Biella (Italy), of the wool from the breed "Sambucana" in Piémont to get a better added value: plaids, pullovers, ...

Processing by the Filature Mazières (a very small spinning mill) in Pyrenees of the fine wool of a rare breed, the Aure et Campan

Processing by the family Couturier in Creuse (France) of the wool of their flock of the breed Limousine in knitting yarn and knitwear

Processing of wool by the Lana Corsa workshop (Corsica, France) of the wool of the breed "Corse" in knitwear and fabrics

Use of the wool of two rare breeds from Italy (Garessina and Sambucana) for the restoration of a masterpiece of Kounellis in the Centre Pompidou in Paris

Processing of the wool of the breed North Ronaldsay (Orkney Islands, UK) after the installation of a Minimill set of machines.

In most of these examples the wool products are then sold by the sheep breeders themselves. A good promotion of the wool products could catch the attention to the breed and help to develop it.

The exhibition "Wool of Europe" proposed by ATELIER presents a lot of rare breeds with photos, samples of raw wool and finished products. In 2004, it was displayed in PRIMEVERE, a Bio Fair in Lyon with the theme "biodiversity"

The International Feltmakers association (UK) organised some years ago a travelling exhibition named "On the map" with artistic felted pieces made with wool from a lot of local breeds. The exhibition was seen in France, Italy and Spain.

Craft is also a good way to produce special objects and clothes, hand-made with wool of these special breeds.

Wool of these rare breeds is also used in workshops with children and thus, they learn the story of the breeds. See Mouton-Village in Deux-Sèvres (France) and a lot of pedagogical farms.

Small mills and special machines are required for processing small batches of wool. Mills existing in UK, France, Austria, ...

ATELIER, a network of the wool sector

A lot of people from European cities, and even from rural regions, have no connections to the world of farmers and breeders any more.

With wool, this natural and renewable resource, we are trying to recreate these links.

The General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 December 2006 proclaimed "2009, the International Year of Natural Fibres". This year will raise consumer awareness of natural fibres and strengthen demand for natural fibre products, improving the life of the farmers who produce them and revenues for countries that export them. At the same time, promoting the use of natural fibres will enhance the environment.

ATELIER and the European Wool Group will organise and coordinate a lot of events, exhibitions and promotion actions during this year 2009. Researches for innovative uses of wool and promotion of rare breeds could be planned and coordinated with different European countries.

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