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Goat breeds and production systems in Greece

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Greek goats – population size

According to Eurostat, there are about **11 million** goat heads in **EU** (December 2021). Of these, the largest number (30%) (about **3.6** million) are reared in **Greece,** followed by **Spain** (2.8 million), **Romania** (1.5 million), **France** (1.2 million and **Italy** (1 million animals)

Goat farming sector in Greece

In Greece, **goat farming** constitutes an important sector of primary production contributing substantially to the agricultural **economy** of the country (FAO, 2021), offering **employment** to **rural population** in the disadvantaged/remote areas of the country, and providing **income** to thousands of producers (Batzios et al. 2023) with key cultural and environmental implications as well

Goat production systems in Greece

Most of the goat farms are owned by smallholders situated in **Less Favored Areas** (**semi – mountainous** or **insular)** featuring local low producing breeds well adapted to diverse, harsh environments. These animals are kept under an **extensive** or **semi-extensive** - low input production system exploiting the available local resources that are not suitable for other activities (Zygogiannis and Katsaounis, 2009; Gelasakis et al, 2017; Vouraki 2019, Theodoridis et al, 2019).

In **lowland areas**, exotic purebred and crossbred goats of higher producing ability are reared, under **intensive** or **semi - intensive** systems in modern, large - scaled farms that depend heavily on concentrates and forage feed (Theodoridis et al, 2019).

Greek goat breeds and populations

The vast majority (**90%**) of the Greek indigenous goats (*Capra hircus*) is comprised of the **Eghoria** breed. The rest (10%), comprises of another autochthonous breed, the **Skopelos** breed (named after the homonymous island) as well as some **exotic** breeds (Damascus, Alpine, Saanen, Murcia etc) and their crosses (Michailidou et al. 2019).

The Eghoria goat

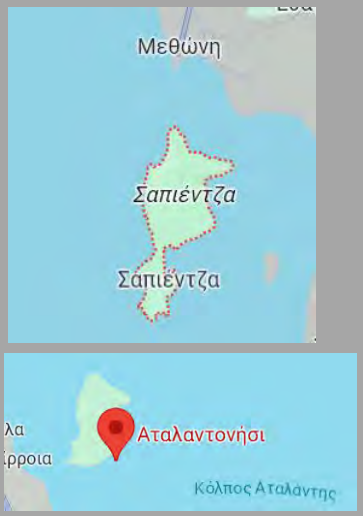
The **Eghoria goat** breed is found all over Greece, from isolated islands to inaccessible mountainous areas, and is characterized by large variability in phenotypic characteristics (approximately 39 different types). This is a **dual purpose** breed with milk yield ranging from 100 to 170 kg/lactation, depending on the farming type (Michailidou et al. 2019).

The Skopelos goat

The **Skopelos goat** is a highly homogenous breed (based on phenotypic and productive traits) comprised of about 11,000 animals that are reared mainly at Northern Sporades islands (Skopelos and Alonnisos). The breed has been intensively studied through national conservation and animal recording programs. The total **milk yield** ranges from 225 to 260 kg/lactation. The breed is famous for its high **milk fat** (5.5%) and **protein content** (4.5%).

Cretan aegagros

Apart from the domesticated goats (*Capra hircus*), another interesting sub-species, i.e. the ***Cretan aegagros*** (*Capra aegagrus cretica),* known as **agrimi or cre-cre (Cre-tan cre-ature**) is also encountered on various isolated islands (like **Cretan islands:** Dia, Agioi Theodoroi and Agioi Pantes, **Sapienza** (Methoni) and **Atalantonisi)**.



Concluding remarks

• Despite having the largest goat population in the EU, Greece ranks 4th in milk production and 1st in goat meat production. Low milk production ranking is explained by does' **low productivity,** derived from the traditional and **low input** production system applied.

• In Greece, **goat milk** is usually used as a supplement to sheep milk for the production of protected designation of origin (PDO) cheeses, such as **feta**, or other traditional cheeses. Lately, there is a growing interest/market in fresh goat milk and dairy products (cheese, yoghurt, kefir) based solely on goat's milk.

• The local genetic material supports productions systems that are **less vulnerable** in world crises and are of crucial importance for the economic cohesion, family economy and social function of the marginal regions of the country.

• Genetic studies have demonstrated that Greek goats are a valuable **genetic reservoir** to be further exploited in national breeding schemes.

Thank you!