

## DIVERSIFICATION OF FARM ACTIVITIES FOR THE GOOD USE OF FINISHED PRODUCTION IN SHEEP

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**Abstract:** *Most professional sheep farms get most of their income from the sale of lambs and of fattened youth, reconditioned meat, and processed products, which means that prices have a great influence on the profitability and viability of the farms. Although professional farms are capable of producing and processing the entire production obtained from sheep, they encounter difficulties, although there are numerous marketing options. In the analysis of marketing options, it is important to compare “net” prices because the different marketing options have different costs and, for these reasons, it is necessary to diversify the farm activities for a direct capitalization at good prices of the finished production. In order to find viable solutions to increase the net income obtained from the valorisation of the products along the most efficient marketing channels, it is necessary to differentiate farm activities, processing and marketing by direct sale and auction sale according to the market trends and the needs of consumption of the population.*

**Key words:** *sheep, colostrum, body condition.*

### INTRODUCTION

Diversification of farm activities, processing, and marketing depending on the type of farm to find viable solutions to increase net income obtained from the valorisation of products on the most efficient marketing channels should include:

- **A farmer** as a direct producer of products – from one's own resources;
- **A direct sale** of production to the final consumer (small number) or to the slaughterhouse;
- **An auction sale** of production: [1,5,7,10,21,26]
  - Categories of live sheep by the farmer, herd managers/owners, or slaughterhouse managers/owners;
  - Sheep meat from the slaughterhouse distributed/sold through wholesalers, retailers (retailers), and butchers;
  - Sheep meat exported by slaughterhouses or processed by processors;
  - Milk, sheep milk products marketed by farmers, imported for wholesalers, retailers and processors;
- **A meeting of consumer needs and market trends** – the last stage of the marketing channel. [6,9,12,19]

Diversifying the activity of professional sheep farms to increase operating income, processing, and capitalization should include the most efficient solutions that contribute to improving marketing management methods through:

- Processing in the own slaughterhouse of meat and milk in the processing unit and direct sale through the own units on direct channels;
- Direct sale to slaughterhouses of sheep categories and milk production [4,14,17] to processors;
- Marketing alliance and cooperative;
- Sale at public auction of production from sheep; [2,11,15,16]

- Direct marketing; [18,20,22,25]
- Sale by order-buying broker or dealer;
- Sale on the product market. [3, 8, 13, 23, 24]



**Figure 1. Solutions for diversifying the activity of professional sheep farms**

Source: [own creation]

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

To improve the economic activity of professional sheep farms, an important aspect is the management of marketing according to market demand and supply, as well as the capacity of farms to adapt to competitive prices and consumer needs. By diversifying the farm activity and specialization, production, processing, and valorisation, it is necessary to adjust the market price according to inflation and to work with the real price, the latter being much more volatile than nominal price and going through deeper cycles. This means that, although the shelf price of sheep meat or dairy products may increase from one year to another, the real price may decrease in the same year, which exerts financial pressure on the producer who should diversify his farm activity according to market needs. For these reasons, in this scientific approach using the known methods by which marketing management can be improved, the authors sought the best solutions that, by diversifying farm activities depending on type, economic power, and producer experience, contribute to good capitalization directly through short marketing channels, auction sales on the domestic or foreign market, or through intermediaries under conditions of increased economic efficiency.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

Although a multitude of methods are known that contribute to improving marketing management, we consider that specialization of production and production for market needs, by diversifying farm activities, can be one of the viable solutions for professional sheep breeders. By diversifying the farm activities, production, processing, distribution there are more **direct marketing options** by selling the production or processing in:

- **The processing unit** that:
  - Processes its own production or purchases it as live lambs or carcasses directly from the producer at prices based on the individual value of each lamb or carcass, which indicates **value-based marketing**;
  - Designates a meat processor, where the animals are slaughtered for meat (and where fresh meat is processed) under sanitary-veterinary control;

- Is preferred by large and small sheep producers;
- Offers a base price, with a matrix of premiums and discounts, usually based on carcass weight and quality grade;
- **The marketing and cooperative alliance** that:
  - Contracts the production and performs the slaughter but is difficult to sustain in the long term;
  - Is a group of producers who work together and set standards for the type of lambs they will buy;
  - Sells the entire production in carcasses or cuts to commercial chains or other retail outlets;
- **The public auction** that:
  - Is the most common method of direct marketing sales, weekly sales, the place where supply meets demand: prices received at auctions are used to negotiate private sales through commercial treaties;
  - Is a **better marketing option** by quality categories than weekly sales;
  - Is a place of price discovery, i.e., the process of determining the price on the market through the interactions of buyers and sellers;
  - Performs vital functions in the meat industry because it can include large lots and constant market supply<
  - Presents several disadvantages for farmers and processors because the following are not known with precision:
    - a. The demand from one week to the next;
    - b. The price in advance that can offer for sale on local markets (small volume) for prices significantly lower than the prices paid on regional or terminal markets (large volume);
    - c. The insurance fees, sales commission, and rental of the auction site.
  - Is a viable method of improving production value because:
    - a. It is the most convenient direct marketing method that can be used by farmers, processors;
    - b. It is available weekly, if assisted reproduction methods are used, by stimulating off-season production;
    - c. It is easy and prompt;
    - d. It ensures guaranteed payment of production.
- **Direct marketing:**
  - Ensures the sale of a much smaller volume of products when marketing directly to the consumer;
  - Is **the only way** to compete with larger producers, due to economies of scale for small professional farms;
  - **Favours producers with “skills”**, producers located in close proximity to populated centres and small producers;
  - **Involves the retention of a larger part of the consumer’s money by the producer**, which makes the income potential for direct marketing substantially higher than for selling on the commodity market, although the costs (processing and transportation) are much higher;
  - Can take the following forms of sales, which contribute to the improvement of the economic activity of small professional farms:
    - a. **Retail / wholesale to restaurants** or other retail outlets;
    - b. **Farm sale**;
    - c. **Subscription sale** (community-supported agriculture);

- d. **Internet sale;**
- e. **Sale at local farmers' markets;**
- f. **Sale for freezing;**
  - Can be called **niche marketing** and **value-added marketing** and tends to require the accumulation, specialization, and education with a set of skills of farmers, different from that of raising and exploiting sheep for meat or milk production.
- **Carcass sale**, which includes:
  - Customers who purchase frozen meat, differentiated according to the type of carcass they prefer to buy – size, age category – but also the feeding method during the exploitation period:
    - a. Lamb fed with unique feed, considered a premium product, because it has a milder flavour;
    - b. Lamb fattened on pasture, considered healthier in terms of fatty acid profile.
- **Direct sale:**
  - Is considered the most common form of direct marketing, of “freezing” lambs and young sheep;
  - Involves payment for processing operations based on cutting and processing instructions received from the customer, depending on the processing unit and location but involves several sanitary-veterinary management actions:
    - a. Stamping the carcass for resale;
    - b. Transportation to the processor by the producer;
    - c. Sale by carcass weight;
- **Sale to a broker, order buyer or dealer**, which:
  - Saves the costs associated with selling lambs at auction;
  - Requires a cash transaction if the buyer is not licensed;
  - Requires a licensed buyer;
  - Allows for early negotiation of the purchase price;
  - Is a marketing model that has certain advantages for the farm, because the purchase is made directly from the farm and does not require transportation to a place of purchase, reducing costs for the production farm.
- **Selling on the goods market:**
  - Includes selling the production directly to a broker, buyer or dealer, at a public auction, at a processing unit, place of purchase, through a cooperative, through a buying firm, or through a marketing group;
  - Has the major advantage of favouring large commercial producers of sheep products and with low costs but also farmers, located in close proximity to the terminal markets where the animals are purchased for immediate slaughter.

Taking into account these marketing methods, which can improve marketing management, the authors consider that the good valorisation of the production from sheep depends on **the resilience of the professional farm as a business**, a case that requires the following steps and aspects:

1. **Information seeking / networking**, the action or process of interacting with others to exchange information and develop professional or social contacts:
  - a. Membership in product associations: marketing cooperatives, marketing organizations, professional organizations, sectoral organizations;

- b. Use of multiple sources of information in making decisions regarding farm management.
2. **Key performance data** regarding the costs of:
  - a. Purchase of feed resources;
  - b. Veterinary health/medicines;
  - c. Change in net assets in the last year;
  - d. Total income from support from state subsidies;
  - e. Total income from other activities without subsidies.
3. **Flexibility** in the choice of inputs and input suppliers and in the choice and number of outputs and services;
4. **Farm resilience**, which consists of:
  - a. Sales contracts with the buyer for the quantity of milk or meat production;
  - b. Frequency of reviewing the financial situation of the business;
  - c. Degree of realization of the desired investment;
  - d. Number of sources of income from the farm;
5. **Vision / strategy**: carrying out benchmarking activities, a process of measuring the performance of a company's products, services or processes compared to those of another business, to:
  - a. Compare the performance with that of similar farms;
  - b. Design a recent business plan for the business;
  - c. Design a succession plan for the person who will take over the farm.

The authors **conclude** that diversifying sheep farm activities requires effort and adaptability, but can significantly improve the health and success of the sheep farm as a business because it can be a smart move to improve the farm's overall income and stability and for a more robust and varied agricultural income. Farm diversification – which can increase farm productivity throughout the year, generate income, and maintain farm stability even in difficult times – can be done in several ways. The authors propose the following diversification models for farms to implement to improve the value of products from sheep:

**A. Diversification of the type of production** in three ways:

- a. **Diversification with plant species**, which involves implementing the following activities:
  - Conducting market research to measure interest in new crops used in sheep feed from current partners;
  - Exploring different crops that can thrive on the sheep farm land;
  - Finding new buyers who might be interested in using new crops in sheep feed;
  - Considering investing in seeds for new crops;
- b. **Diversifying with animal species**, if the farm is an animal farm: in addition to raising sheep, goats can also be raised for clearing meadows;
- c. **Producing renewable energy**, which involves investigating the land to identify opportunities for producing renewable energy with solar panels or wind turbines.

It should also be considered that diversifying sheep categories or species types such as goats alongside the base species can lead to benefits, such as more efficient use of previously ungrazed land. The authors believe that this model of species diversification can contribute to increasing the overall resilience of the professional farm and can create new income opportunities through:

**A.1. Diversifying the type of products** through:

- a. New products from sheep and goat meat, new dairy products;
- b. Improving existing products through re-branding, identifying opportunities for producing products that combine the production of different species;
- c. Wind mills.

**A.2. Diversifying the type of farm** by transforming a sheep farm into an agri-tourism farm: the activity can be diversified to maintain the stability of any farm, even in difficult times when sales are lower. The profile of an agri-tourism farm can be among the most diverse (Table 1).

**Table 1.**

**Profiles of agri-tourism sheep farms**

<b>Agri-tourism farm profile</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Agritourism	Taking care of sheep categories; Traditional processing of sheep products.
Travelling and events	Events on the farm; Festival of cheese weighing.
Connection with the earth and the rural	Sheep herding; Vertical or horizontal transhumance; Sleeping on the farm; Sheep accompanying.
Entertainment and relaxation	Consumption of fresh produce; Relaxation, incitation, pleasure.
Education and awareness	Learning to raise sheep; Introducing to processing; Information on farm activities.
Practical experience at the farm	Feeding the sheep; Weaning the lambs; Milking and clearing the milk
Recreation in the open air	Hicking; Leading sheep to water sources or to milking areas.

Source: [26]

**A.3. Farm stand**, which:

- Is good because it brings people to the farmer and not the farmer to the people;
- Gives the farmer the opportunity to have full transparency towards his customers;
- Does not always need to have someone on site;
- Does not force the farmer to leave the farm to sell his products;
- Is the most common way to approach agritourism – creating his own “grocery store”;
- Is a marketing model that allows other local farmers and artisans to sell their products at the same stand;
- Does not require a building and does not have to be open twenty-four hours.

**B. Stimulating entrepreneurship**

The need to stimulate entrepreneurship in rural areas is great and in resonance with the need to increase the potential of rural communities from the perspective of traditional activities, culture, landscape, and local resources. Accessible solutions for improving marketing management could be:

**B.1. Transforming small sheep farms into social farms**, i.e., farms where people with disabilities could find a family “shelter” in a natural, healthy environment, and share the farm activities with the farmer and the farmer’s family on a one-day commitment, which involves assuming tasks that would include:

- Supervising the lambs;
- Maintaining the farm;
- Social involvement and compliance with health and safety practices.

**B.2. Transforming small sheep farms into inclusive farms, green farms, and therapeutic farms.** All these expressions designate rehabilitation frameworks and characteristics of community-based, family-based, professional, and service user-based workforce. This type of sheep farm includes:

- Conventional productions: agrotourism activities, animal production, practically adapted in regions where entrepreneurship is more accepted;
- Special productions: organic production, traditional processing of sheep production.

**B.3. Assisted therapy** is an alternative or complementary type of therapy that involves different categories of animals, as a form of treatment:

- Seeing sheep or lambs at rest;
- Observing sheep in a state of peace that can signal safety and security;
- Working with animals to transmit feelings of well-being to patients.

To do it, a sheep farmer can become a social farmer, taking the following steps:

- **Exploring possibilities:** by identifying sources from which he can obtain more information about social farming and identifying and accessing social farming opportunities;
- **Knowing the conditions in which he can become a social farmer:** what are the activities and services that the farmer can offer on his sheep farm, in his current range of operations, for groups of individuals that he considers suitable for his farm;
- **Ensuring the concrete conditions for the functioning of the social farm** by:
  - a. preparing the farm profile, which should contain details regarding the activities/jobs on the farm throughout the year;
  - b. the layout, size, and surroundings of the farm, the type of animals, the type of crops, other activities;
  - c. photographs of the farm and the location;
  - d. agricultural projects for diversification into cheese production for better capitalization;
- **Agricultural business planning**, which should include details about:
  - a. current assets and resources;
  - b. the activities that the farmer wishes to carry out;
  - c. other resources he needs to enable him to carry out his planned activities;
- **Engaging in social agriculture as part of farm diversification**, multifunctional farm, social enterprise and provision of social agriculture services.

Practicing social farming presents advantages for small professional sheep farms, ensuring good distribution through the implemented marketing model and benefits for:

- a. The farmer’s family:
  - Financial benefits: added economic value achieved on the market for goods produced on a social farm and income sufficient at least to cover expenses, if they are to be borne;

- Non-financial benefits: improving the image of agriculture in the area by recognizing the provision of care support and positive feedback from participants, families and reference bodies;
- b. The service user, who has benefits for:
  - Physical health – Improved physical, agricultural, and other abilities, better developed skills, reduced aggression, improved nutrition;
  - Mental health: engaging in an activity that interests and motivates him, increasing self-responsibility, improving social behaviour, improving well-being and restoring feelings of worth;
  - Social health: approaching others more appropriately, providing help, adopting the perspectives of others, improving the degree of social interaction, making decisions, demonstrating ethical and social responsibility, planning, recognizing emotions in oneself and others, recognizing strengths and areas of need, regulating and managing strong emotions, respecting others and oneself, solving problems, feeling the emotions of others and setting positive and realistic goals;
- **Society as a whole** (Genova, Maccaroni & Viganò, 2020): engaging in outdoor activities that allow individuals with specific needs to demonstrate their skills to the general public, providing farmers with additional manual labour for daily farm activities, ensuring a more efficient use of public finances and ensuring more diversified agricultural incomes.

**C. Social agri-zootechnics** is a valuable novelty, at the regional level in Romania also because, once the proposed principles are implemented, it allows farmers and groups of people with disabilities to:

- a. Access policy and program alternatives to improve their economic situation;
- b. Maximize customers' efforts in exploring product options and choices directly from the sheep farm;
- c. Become more effective in their relationships with agencies, bureaucracies, and professionals involved in this type of agriculture;
- d. Implement the principles of social agriculture in professional sheep farms.

## CONCLUSIONS

Specialising in sheep production and producing for market needs, by diversifying farm activities, can be one of the viable solutions for breeders because the public auction of products has a multitude of advantages and is a method of improving valorisation, being the most convenient method of direct marketing. The sale of processed products from sheep is the most common form of marketing and involves the payment of processing operations based on the cutting and processing instructions received from the client, depending on the processing unit and location but also on sanitary-veterinary management actions; good valorisation also depends on the resilience of the professional farm as a business. Diversifying the activities of professional sheep farms requires effort and adaptability, but can significantly improve the health and success of the sheep farm as a business because it can be a smart move to improve income generation and overall stability. Diversifying farm activities can increase productivity throughout the year, generate income, and maintain farm stability even in difficult times, if new diversification models are proposed for implementation that improve capitalisation by diversifying the type of production with plant and animal species that can bring benefits regarding the more efficient use of previously ungrazed land and contribute to increasing the overall resilience of the professional farm through new income opportunities, obtaining new products, and

improving existing ones by re-branding according to the needs of the agri-food market. Diversifying the type of farm by transforming the sheep farm into an agri-tourism farm can improve the valorisation activity and maintain the stability of any farm, even in difficult times when sales are lower and the farm stand is the best model to bring consumers to the farmer, providing the farmer the opportunity to have full transparency towards his customers. A farm stand is the most common way to approach agritourism by creating your own “grocery store”, and a direct marketing model. Practicing social agriculture presents advantages for small professional sheep farms by ensuring from a good distribution through the marketing model a good distribution on the market and benefits for the farmer’s family, economic added value achieved on the market for the goods produced on a social farm and sufficient income at least to cover expenses but also non-financial benefits of improving the image of agriculture in the area and positive feedback.

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