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The production and dairying of ewe's milk in the Latium region

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SUMMARY - Stock-farming and cheese-making in the Latium region has century-old origins and traditions which are still strongly rooted in our territory. The evolution of the traditional breeding techniques resulted in a gradual then definitive replacement of local breeds by others with a more remarkable milk production aptitude. The typical regional product from these breeding farms is "Pecorino Romano". In the past years the production of less ripe ewe-cheese has increased and diversified. The sheep feeding has always been traditionally linked to grazing and summer grazing, thus maintaining the features of usual biological sheep breeding. The exploitation and promotion of these typical regional products is definitely linked to environmental safeguard and preservation.

Key words: Sheep, ewe's milk, cheese, cheese dairy.

RESUME - "La production et la transformation du lait de brebis dans la région du Latium". L'élevage et la fabrication des fromages dans la région du Latium ont des origines et des traditions très anciennes qui sont encore très vivantes sur ce territoire. L'évolution des techniques d'élevage traditionnelles conduit à un remplacement graduel puis définitif des races locales par d'autres qui présentent des potentiels laitiers plus élevés. Le produit régional typique issu de ces fermes laitières est le Pecorino Romano. Au cours de ces dernières années, la production de fromages de brebis moins affinés a augmenté. L'alimentation des brebis a toujours été traditionnellement liée au pâturage notamment en été, ce qui maintient les caractéristiques de l'élevage biologique classique de moutons. L'exploitation et la promotion de ces produits régionaux typiques sont systématiquement liées à la sauvegarde et à la préservation de l'environnement.

Mots-clés : Elevage ovin, lait de brebis, fromage typique.

Introduction

Sheep raising and the use of ewe's milk-cheeses have remote traditions in the Latium region.

Nonetheless, as far as the raising systems are concerned, noteworthy changes have taken place in recent years.

As a matter of fact, the transhumance has been replaced by stable raising with occasional periods of summer pasturing.

Stable breeding has been preferred by farmers also because of social motives: the shepherd is increasingly less willing to follow the flock of sheep and tries to organize his work rationally. This new organization in sheep farming is the consequence of a productive specialization. Indeed, the replacement of ancient breeds reared in central Italy with ewes with a more remarkable lactiferous aptitude has been a basic innovation.

This was accomplished both through crossbreeding and through the introduction of purebred animals. Consequently, nearly everywhere, the breed "Sopravissana" succumbed to the "Comisana" and "Sarda" breeds.

A further important change has been the decreased demand for ripe hard cheese by consumers, who have increasingly turned to fresh or less ripe products besides mixed cheeses.

The data analysed show both the new zootechnic situation and the use of ewe's milk.

Sheep resources

If we focus our attention only on the number of sheep (Table 1), according to the data gathered by the Provincial Offices of Statistics, the total sheep resources in the Latium region at the end of the year 1995 was assessed at 638,500 animals. 73% of the sheep in Latium is reared in the provinces of Viterbo and Rome which, as a result, are particularly important.

Table 1. Total sheep resources in the Latium region on 1st December 1995

Province	Sheep (No. of heads)	%
Frosinone	91,000	14
Latina	38,000	6
Rieti	45,000	7
Rome	214,500	34
Viterbo	250,000	39
Region	638,500	100

Source: Chamber of Commerce Industry Agriculture and Handicraftsmanship

The breeds reared in the Latium region

According to the data from the Italian Confederation of Farmers and the Italian Association of Breeders, the total sheep reared in the Latium region is estimated to be as follows: 41% is made up by sheep of the "Sarda" breed, 35% by the "Comisana" breed, 5.5% by the "Sopravissana" breed and 18.5% by other breeds.

According to the data supplied by Assonapa (National Association for Sheep Farming) concerning the year 1995, only 3% of regional sheep resources appears recorded in the Family Book with a total of 24,437 heads: out of this, 11,327 (46%) are of the "Sarda" breed, 4,234 (17%) of the "Comisana" breed, 1,812 (7%) of the breed "Sopravissana", 7,064 (30%) of other breeds (Table 2).

Table 2. Regional total of the sheep recorded in the Family Book on 30th June 1995

	Sarda	Comisana	Sopravissana	Other	Total
No. of head	11,327	4,234	1,812	7,064	24,437
%	46	17	7	30	100

Source: Assonapa (National Association for Sheep Farming)

Milk production

According to the data recorded by ISTAT/Assolatte (Central Statistics Office/Association of Milk Producers) the national production of ewe's milk was equal to 6,604,532 quintals, out of which 5,996,532 quintals were equal to 91% of the total production and were assigned to the production of dairy products.

According to the data supplied by ISTAT and by the Provincial Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Handicraftsmanship, the region Latium showed the following production: 878,500 quintals of ewe's milk, of which 719,000 quintals, were assigned to dairy production which was equal to 82% of the regional production. In this way the region Latium, placed third after Sardinia and Sicily in the production of ewe's milk.

The share of ewe's milk assigned to dairy production proves that it was produced by 74% by the provinces of Rome and Viterbo, with 200,000 quintals and 334,000 quintals respectively (Table 3).

Table 3. Ewe's milk assigned to milk processing, subdivided into provinces, on 1st December 1995 (expressed in quintals)

Frosinone	Latina	Rieti	Rome	Viterbo	Total
64,000	51,000	70,000	200,000	334,000	719,000

Source: ISTAT/Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Handicraftsmanship

The distribution in the territory and main characteristics of regional cheese factories

According to the data gathered, it appears that in the region Latium there are cheese factories which produce dairy products using not only ewe's milk.

The provinces which show the highest number of milk processing establishments are Rome and Latina. In the former, there are 22 cheese factories whereas in the latter 24. In the provinces of Viterbo and Frosinone, there are 19 and 15 cheese factories respectively. The province of Rieti carries on the milk processing activity on the margin, since it counts only 3 dairy factories (Table 4).

Table 4. Distribution of dairy factories subdivided into provinces, on October 1997

	Frosinone	Latina	Rieti	Rome	Viterbo	Total
Cheese factories	15	24	3	22	19	86

Source: Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Handicraftsmanship

According to Federlazio (Federation of small - and medium - sized concerns in the Latium region) the dairy factories which process mostly ewe's milk are 20, which is equal to 23% of regional dairy factories, distributed by 70% in the provinces of Rome and Viterbo (Table 5).

Table 5. Provincial distribution of dairy factories processing mostly ewe's milk

	Frosinone	Latina	Rieti	Rome	Viterbo	Total
Number	1	1	4	7	7	20
%	5	5	20	35	35	100

Source: Federlazio (Federation of small - and medium - sized concerns in the region Latium) 1997

The cheese factories which are members of the cooperative association "Consorzio del Pecorino Romano" authorized to produce this typical cheese, are eight and distributed as follows: 5 in the province of Rome, 2 in the province of Viterbo and 1 in the province of Latina (Table 6).

Table 6. Regional distribution of the cheese factories associated to "Consorzio del Pecorino Romano"

	Frosinone	Latina	Rieti	Rome	Viterbo	Total
Number	-	1	-	5	2	8
%	-	1.25	-	62.5	25	100

Source: Consorzio del Pecorino Romano

Supply

The ewe's milk destined to cheese-making is provided by 91% in the region, out of which 70% by the neighbouring areas of the commune of the concern. Besides being nearly wholly independent from foreign countries, but a very little dependence, the industry has to establish in the neighbourhood of stock farms, since this has a strategic importance (Table 7).

Table 7. Provenience of ewe's and goat's milk used by dairies

Own commune or bordering communes	Promoter communes	Bordering provinces	Bordering regions	Other regions	Abroad
70	14	7	2	3	4

Source: Data processed by ISMEA

The province of Viterbo is undoubtedly the most representative in using ewe's milk with 52% of the total regional use.

The following one is Rome with 27.6% and Latina with 19.4% (Table 8).

Table 8. Provincial distribution expressed in percentage of the ewe's milk used in 1994

	Frosinone	Latina	Rieti	Rome	Viterbo	Total
%	0.2	19.4	0.6	27.6	52.2	100

Source: Data processed by ISMEA

Destination of ewe's milk and typical products

Pecorino Romano

The law acknowledges the controlled denomination of origin of Pecorino Romano through the Presidential Decree 30th October 1995 No. 1269 and following amendments, as it is envisaged in the last Ministerial Decree 6th June 1995; the acknowledgment of protected controlled denomination with the EEC regulation. 1107/96, 12th July 1996, limiting the production of this cheese not only in the region Latium, and precisely in the provinces of Rome, Frosinone, Grosseto, Latina and Viterbo, but also in the region Sardinia in the territory of Cagliari, Sassari and Nuoro.

Pecorino Romano is a hard cooked cheese, produced exclusively with fresh full-cream ewe's milk and curdled with lamb's curd.

In the year 1995-1996, in the period from October to July, only 5 cheese factories out of the 8 authorized ones, produced Pecorino Romano. The ewe's milk used for this production amounted to 35,139,200 kilos, produced by 11% by the region Latium and by 89% by Sardinia, with 4,096,200 kilos and 31,043,000 kilos, respectively (Table 9).

Caciotta Romana (a kind of cheese from Central Italy)

The production of ewe's milk, besides being processed into Pecorino Romano, has always been traditionally used to obtain more versatile dairy products and of immediate consumption such as: caciotta.

It is a fresh and/or half-ripe cheese (12-90 days) made up of sole ewe's milk, produced in the provinces of Rome and Viterbo.

For this production, a co-operative association aimed at its protection and exploitation does not exist. The market prospects are considered saftifying on the grounds of the remarkable favour found by the product on the market.

In 1995, the annual production amounted to 1,500,000 kilos, using 13% of the regional ewe's milk. In addition, "Caciotta Romana" is produced also with a mixed milk: cow and ewe's milk.

Table 9. Production of Pecorino Romano

Regions	Year 95/96	%
Lazium (kg)	4,096,200	11
Sardinian (kg)	31,043,000	89
Total regions (kg)	35,139,200	100

Source: Consorzio Pecorino Romano

Caciotta from Amatrice

It is produced in the north-eastern area of the province of Rieti (Amatrice and Leonessa). This is considered a typical kind of cheese from this area, since it is the most natural system for the preservation of the milk produced by the sheep and cattle farms of these areas. This caciotta is a mixed cheese made up by 50% of ewe's milk and by 50% of cow's milk, it is fresh and half-ripe (15-60 days). Even for this typical product a co-operative association for its protection and exploitation does not exist. In 1995, the annual production amounted to 100,000 kilos, using 0.5% of the regional ewe's milk and 5% of the provincial one.

Caciotta with pepper

The production area of this typical product is above all the province of Frosinone. It is produced by 50% by ewe's milk and 50% by cow's milk, normally eaten fresh and half-ripe (15-60 days). It has a spicy tang because of the addition of red and black pepper.

The provenance of this product is uncertain, since besides the province of Frosinone, its preparation is widespread in every regional province, thus diversifying the typical mixed "caciotta".

Ricotta Romana

Ricotta Romana has very ancient roots: it was already well known by the Greeks and by the Romans.

One of the first known quotation is by Columella in the seventh chapter of his work *De re rustica*. Besides explaining sheep farming systems, this agronomist describes also the dairy techniques of several cheeses, among which the "ricotta".

This cheese comes from the province of Rome. Once it was produced solely through the serum obtained by processing ewe's milk; at present it is produced also in other provinces through the serum obtained mainly by processing cow's milk.

It appears with a drier, dense and lumpy structure, since it is left dripping for a longer time; it is eaten very fresh as a cheese with a mild flavour and it is widely used for gastronomic purposes.

The reimander is the whey.

Conclusions

In the Latium region sheep farming shows the characteristics which allow it to be considered as an ecological zootechnic activity, therefore the production of the sheep sector should be addressed to typical products with certified quality. "Pecorino Romano" is surely the most well-known cheese and, in this moment, it deserves a higher attention to be included in the typical biological production, with unquestionable advantages both for the producer-raiser and for the consumer, who is increasingly beware of the healthiness and genuineness of the product.

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