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Bordaleira de Entre Douro e Minho sheep breed production system

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Abstract. Bordaleira de Entre Douro e Minho is a NW Portugal autochthonous sheep breed used primarily for meat production. This breed is chosen by its local origin, rusticity, and financial support by European agricultural subsidies. There are two varieties in this breed: "Várzea" in the valley and "Monte" in the mountain. To characterize the Bordaleira production system, a survey was carried out to 70 farmers (42 on "Várzea" and 28 on "Monte") with their animals registered in the herdbook. The Bordaleira breed production system is commonly used by elder farmers, with a low level of socio-cultural background and literacy. The small size of the farms (3.58 ± 4.76 ha of arable land), the poor stable conditions, the low degree of mechanization, the low technical support and poor commercialization practices are limiting factors to the development of this production system. This breed has a clear lambing season from September to February with a weaning age of 4 to 6 months old (8 to 12 kg live weight). The sheep feeding system is extensive, based primarily on sylvo-pastoral resources. Ninety three percent of the "Monte" producers utilize daily grazing in areas of uncultivated communitarian land (*baldios*).

Keywords. Portuguese sheep – Sylvo-pastoral systems – Suckling ewes – Weaning.

Le système de production d'ovins de race Bordaleira de Entre Douro Minho

Résumé. La Bordaleira de Entre Douro Minho est une race ovine locale, allaitante, élevée au nord-ouest du Portugal. Cette race est choisie pour son origine locale, sa rusticité, mais aussi pour les subventions agricoles européennes. Il existe deux variétés de cette race : "Várzea", élevée dans la vallée et "Monte", élevée dans la montagne. Pour caractériser le système de production, une enquête a été réalisée auprès de 70 éleveurs ovins (42 de "Várzea" et 28 de "Monte"), dont les animaux étaient enregistrés dans le livre généalogique. Les systèmes de production de la race Bordaleira sont dominés par des éleveurs âgés, à faible niveau socio-culturel et d'instruction. La petite taille des exploitations ($3,58 \pm 4,76$ ha de terres arables), la précarité des bâtiments d'élevage, le faible degré de mécanisation, le faible appui technique et les mauvaises pratiques de commercialisation sont les principales contraintes au développement de ces systèmes de production. Cette race a clairement une saison d'agnelage, de septembre à février, avec un sevrage à l'âge de 4 à 6 mois (8 à 12 kg de poids vif). Le système d'alimentation est extensif et repose sur les ressources sylvo-pastorales. Plus de 90% des éleveurs de la variété "Monte" utilisent quotidiennement des surfaces incultes et gérées par les communautés (*baldios*).

Mots-clés. Ovins portugais – Systèmes extensifs – Brebis allaitantes – Sevrage.

I – Introduction

The purpose of this work is to characterize the production system of the Portuguese breed Bordaleira de Entre Douro e Minho. There are two varieties in this breed: "Várzea" in the valley and "Monte" in the mountain. The sheep production activity is not exclusive, for most farms. There is still the use of cattle and goats. In "Várzea" variety predominant small herds (2 to 20 animals), and that in "Monte" variety there are herds with more than 100 animals.

II – Material and methods

Enquiring social and productive indicators to seventy sheep farms was undertaken (42 on

"Várzea" and 28 on "Monte"), covering approximately 16% of the total farmers, with their animals registered in the herdbook (Cerqueira, 2006).

The statistical analysis was carried out with SPSS for Windows version 12 (SPSS. Inc.). In order to evaluate the breed variety effect, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Tuckey test was used.

III – Results and discussion

The Bordaleira breed production system is commonly used by older farmers (53% with more than 55 years old), with a low level of socio-cultural background and literacy. The producers with secondary or superior degree, are poorly representative (8.5% each), predominating the "read/write" category, in the majority of cases with 48.5% (Fig. 1).

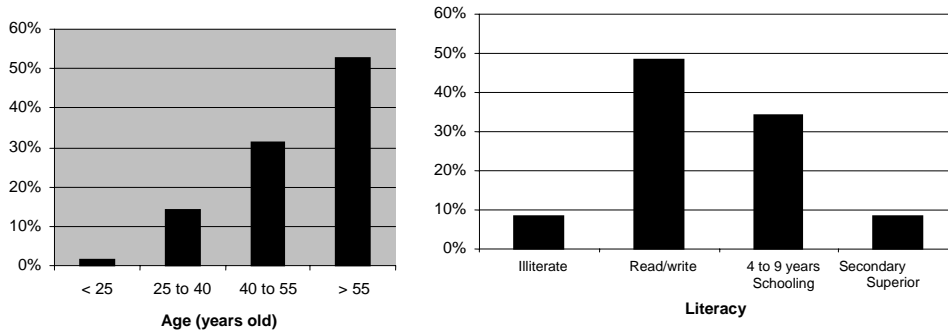


Fig. 1. Sheep producer's age and literacy.

Regarding to farm size (3.58 ± 4.76 ha of arable land), no significant differences ($P > 0.05$) between breed varieties were observed. The farms with less than 4 ha correspond to 85.7% of the total enquired. The use of the common land is a frequent practice for the "Monte" variety producers (93%), functioning as the main feed source, contrarily to what is observed in the "Várzea" variety, where only 14% use the common land (Fig. 2).

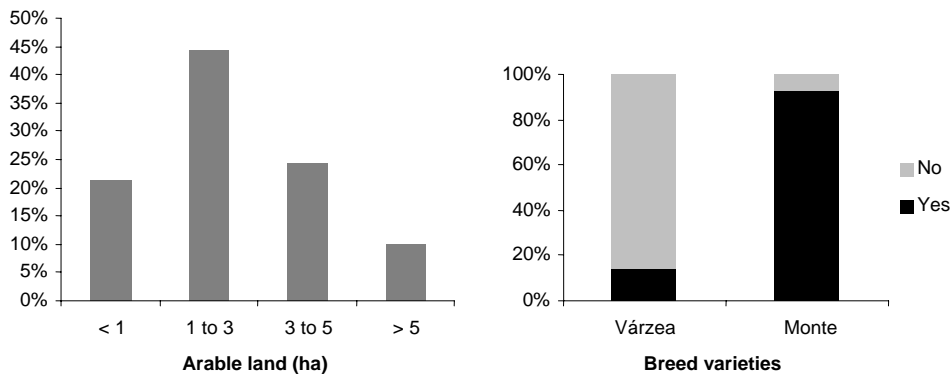


Fig. 2. Arable land (ha) and communitarian land use (yes/no).

Presently, autochthonous sheep breed production is weakly developed, revealing a poor investment in installations and mechanization, since only 31% of the producers own a tractor. It was also noticed that only 11% of the producers possess new installations or adapted stables for sheep breeding.

The animal commercialization is mostly assured by intermediates, the resource to local fairs and direct negotiation with butchers.

The existence of a lambing season clearly marked between the months of September and November, was verified, corresponding to 66% of births, together with a reasonable percentage (30%) of births occurring between December and February.

The predominant weaning age is placed between 4 and 6 months (61%), not verifying significant differences ($P > 0.05$) between varieties. Regarding to weaning weight, 61% of the inquired refer to the interval 8 to 12 kg as predominant, as where the carcass weight is a less known attribute to producers, corresponding in the majority of cases to 50% of dressing percentage (Fig. 3).

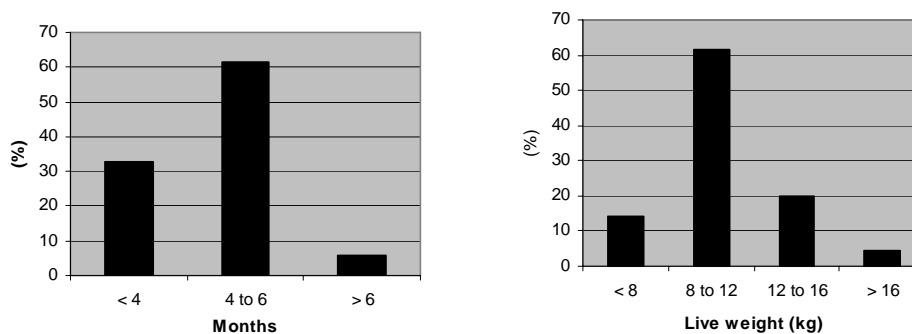


Fig. 3. Lambs weaning age and weight.

IV – Conclusions

In "Várzea" variety, structural factors, such as farm size and fragmented land parcels, influence the breed production systems. In "Monte" variety breeding areas, the common land is the main, and in the majority of cases the only alimentary resource. This system allows a higher number of animals per producer.

The "Bordaleira de Entre Douro e Minho" breed production system is commonly used by elder farmers, with a low degree of instruction.

The lambings take place between September and February revealing seasonality, and a weaning age from 4 to 6 months that correspond 8 to 12 kg of live weight.

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