

Hair fibres from a range of domesticated and undomesticated animal species

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Hair fibres from a range of domesticated and undomesticated animal species have long provided valuable products for use by the human population. Historically, sheep hair fibre described as 'wool', has been an important source of economic wealth for European countries with production surpassed in recent times by Australia and New Zealand. Sheep wool is also an important product of China and South American countries. Other natural animal fibre products and major regions of production include alpaca, llama, vicuña and guanaco (South American camelids: South America), mohair (Angora goats: Southern Africa; Turkey; United States; and Argentina), cashmere (Goats: China; Mongolia; and Iran) and angora (Rabbits: range of countries). The scale of world 'wool' production has been estimated at 2.2 million metric tonnes (mt) (van Dam, 2009) with Australian sheep wool contributing in excess of 0.4 million mt. Production of other fibres

includes that from alpaca (4056 mt) and llama (3343 mt) in South America and raw cashmere in China (8900 mt). In terms of utilisation of the raw or partly processed sheep wool product, China is the major international centre of importation (276 700 mt) and processing (359 700 mt). In regard to examples for Europe, approximate values for importation of wool into Italy and the United Kingdom for the year 2000 are given as 150 000 mt, and 90 000 mt, respectively. There is, in addition, industrial and 'niche market' use of indigenous animal fibre produced in European countries such as France, Italy (e.g. Biella the Wool Company, 2009) and United Kingdom (British Wool Marketing Board, 2009).

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