

Wool classifying course at Gol Wool Station June 1st-3rd 2015

The main aim of the course was for wool classifiers to test their ability to grade spæl sheep fleeces – with main focus on medullation and kemp. The reason is that the spæl sheep fleeces are seeing drastic increase in this problem, and there is a dire need to breed this out of the breed. As described by Stein Terje Moen from the Gol Wool station, if something is not done now – it will be almost impossible to “save” this type of wool, which is unique to Iceland and Norway. In Iceland, they have more or less “given up” – but the Norwegian spinners have been very vocal that this must not happen in Norway with the white spæl sheep. The breed represents 10 % of the Norwegian wool clip, so the volume is not very big. But as mentioned, it is unique as opposed to the crossbred – which is found all over the world.

Participants during the three days were mainly wool classifiers from both Nortura and Fatland wool stations. In addition, the following attended: Arnstein Digernes and Arild Sletta from Rauma, Louise White and Chris Prescott from WTAE (the lab which tests the Norwegian wool clip), Anne Grete Stabekk from Norsk Sau og Geit, Ingeborg Seip from Landbruksdirektoratet, Lise Grøva from Bioforsk, Torhild Kvingedal from Lyngheisenteret, some private interested parties and Norilia’s Tony Barman and Beth Borch. Ingolf Olsen from Fatland was also present; and the course was led by Sissel Berntsen from Animalia.

The course was divided into two as well as into two parts: One practical at the wool station and one theoretical at Pers Hotel. Ingun Klepp and Tone Tobiasson spoke during the theoretical part (about the KRUS project), as did Sissel Berntsen and Anne Grete Stabekk.

That wool now is a part of the “Sheep control” (a digital follow-up on each individual animal), is a big step forward. This means that the quality and other characteristics of the fleeces can enter into the evaluation of the rams, ewes and lambs. What exactly the parameters will be for the wool, is now out for consultation – also the weighting. One issue is for example if wool yield and wool quality will together give one score, when these are quite different parameters.

The good news from NSG, is that they are now interested in seeing a bettering of the wool in the spæl sheep, the question is how this can come about. As there are too few rams with 0% medullation, there will have to be an interim period where rams that have as low percentage as possible, are accepted. NSG have decided to dedicate 0,1% full-time equivalent to wool and shearing, which is Anne Grete Stabekk’s job. She surprised the audience with some statistics: Genes account for 5-30% while the environment accounts for 95-70% of the lamb’s characteristics. One of the main environmental influences, is of course the feed. This will affect the wool, its crimp, its luster, and its micron-count. And what she called an “open fleece” will capture more vegetable matter. This became more clear when we actually inspected the fleeces, and saw that the way some wool “crimped” almost captured vegetable matter; this is highly hereditary. She explained how the “spæl wool characteristics” now will be focused more on in the breeding. But also staple length/yield. Texel sheep have been bred in with some spæl, and this has caused some havoc with the wool. As the wool is very short-stapled, but dense.

It was suggested that sheep farmers make small clippings of the fleeces, and collect in envelopes – and once those long, cold winter-nights arrive; they could spend some time looking at them under a magnifying glass.

According to Stein Terje Moen there is now finally a chance for more effective breeding, as all data will be available, not just from the wool judging (where the judges have too little knowledge on the wool quality). In a conversation during lunch, a wool judge from Fatland Ølen asked Sissel Berntsen if she educated the judges, and she admitted that several years had lapsed since the last time she had been invited to give a course to judges.

Sissel Berntsen’s presentation high-lighted some other challenges. One is that the agricultural subsidies are being revised, and as is happening with cheese, the subsidies that underpin export

(over 80% of the Norwegian clip is exported) may be in danger or at least questioned. She also pointed at another fact that ten years ago the clip was 5 million kilos, today it is around 4. This has not been researched, so one does not know if this is a result of wool being burned or buried, or more sheep skins – as these fetch a high price. The percentage of white wool vs. pigmented is now 88% compared to 12%, the latter has doubled lately, and may be because of an increase in Wild Sheep. Around 2 tons of wool is tested (samples taken from bales). The crimp of the Norwegian wool is increasing; and is one of the main assets of Norwegian wool. As one has started to take out some of the finest C1 (C1 “fine”) Gol has measured 26,9 my, the Bjerka station has had the finest measured: 26,6 my. The mean for this out-take is 28 my, and fetches a higher price. Arnstein Digernes was very proud that the Mikkel and Naturpledd blankets made with this wool, had received the 2015 ICFF Editors' Award in New York recently. The work with the out-take of the finest C1 wool started with a project with The Thief hotel in Oslo, and now this wool has found a market in finer wool blankets for the international market.

At the wool station, WTAE (Wool Testing Authority/Europe) in Wales, gave a short presentation on how samples are taken from the bales. They test all the wool clip in the UK and across Europe, mainly for the purpose of certificates. Norwegian wool is not certified, but is probably the best documented wool. It is uniform and white – and “a joy to test”. Norwegian wool is the only wool tested for medullation and kemp, as this is not important for carpet wool or for more heather yarns. (As most Norwegian wool does end up in carpets, not in uniform dye batches, this was a paradox.) The OFDA can show if the wool is hollow, more and more wool is tested with infra-red and laser scans – mainly for yield. There are four wool labs around the world and they all cooperate and harmonize results. They do not test for black fibers or for medullation in pigmented wool. This would be possible if one compared OFDA and laser results. It was agreed that this would be tried out.

The participants graded a large set of fleeces, most were white spæl, but there were also pigmented samples. The results high-lighted how hard it is to judge medullation and kemp. Fibre finesse is not a problem, but in the samples (tested in Wales) there was as much as 34% medullation in some samples. To be acceptable as grade 1, 6% is the absolute maximum (for spæl). It seems that the kemp content is under control, but medullation far from and in the daily classifying there is not enough time to study samples from each fleece under a loupe or magnifying glass. So one often uses visual clues, such as luster (medullation makes for less lustrous wool). In crossbred wool it is much easier to see medullation as the hairs will stand up as almost a brush.

When looking at the pigmented spæl wool, Stein Terje Moen commented that this type of wool competes with “garbage collection” when it comes to handling. Especially the very mixed fleeces are sought after, but they generally get down-graded because of black hairs with medullation. This type of wool is more “in vogue” than the black and brown fleeces. There is little use (in Norway) for this wool, as one needs a certain volume and a market. Only Hillesvåg buys pigmented wool from other breeds, while Rauma buys pigmented C1S.

There was some discussion about separating the cover wool from the bottom hairs in the spæl, three projects have tried this – but failed – we were told (the hand-separating done in the VikingGold project not included). About 100 kilos of the best spæl sheep lambswool is excellent quality, as far as we understood this is mainly sold to Sweden through out-take at the Gol station.

A discussion also arose on the finest spring wool from lambs and the wool on bottle-fed lambs that are slaughtered for the barbecue market but not sheared at all. The wool is extremely fine, but very short. Again the discussion centered around markets, specified out-take vs new classification (which needs to be year-round classes).

We now have two more interested parties who want to join Krus: Fatland and Rauma/Røros Tweed.



Appendix 1: Program for both courses

Teori på møterom hos Pers Hotell.

- Nytt stort ullprosjekt! Ingun Grimstad Klepp og Tone Tobiasson.
- Avlsarbeid på ull i NSG. Anne Grete Stabekk.
- Fagtjenesten for ull med morgendagens program, statistikk mv. Sissel Berntsen.

Praksis på Norilias ullstasjon.

- WTAE ved Chris Prescott vil demonstrere korrekt kjerneprøvetaking.
- Spælprøver! Kåre Kristoffersen (Fatland Ull), Stein Terje Moen (Norilia Ull) og Sissel Berntsen (Fagtjenesten for ull) er "minglende konsulenter".

Appendix 2: Participant list (not everyone showed up)

- ❖ NORTURA FORUS:
Odd-Eirik Steen
Arne Stangeland
Wenche Leikvoll
Jarle Idland
- ❖ NORTURA SANDEID:
Borghild Øyna
Janine H. Grimaas
Stina Fosen
Hilde Fosen
Gunn Marit Owe
Kristina Hundseid
- ❖ NORTURA RUDSHØGDA/OTTA:
Ahenata Leira
Eivind Hagebakken
Ronny Kjellevoid
Steinar Stubbrud
- ❖ NORTURA FØRDE:
Nils Paulen
Arve Heggheim
Ivar Erikstad
Magnar Erikstad
Nazif Dalseth
- ❖ NORTURA MALVIK:
Kenneth Vasseli
Olaf Berset
Odd Asle Skinderhaug
Bente Breivik
- ❖ NORTURA BJERKA:
Merete Vorkinn
Tor Jan Birkelund
Svein Granmo
- ❖ NORTURA MÅLSELV:
Tom Rune Olsen
Hanne Lind Helgesen
Odd Arne Rognmo
- ❖ NORILIA OSLO:
Tony Barman
Beth Borch
- ❖ FATLAND ULL JÆREN:
Heidi Hetland
Tone Britt Gjøse
- ❖ FATLAND JÆREN:
Berit Pettersen
- ❖ FATLAND ULL/
FATLAND ULL KARMØY:
Ingolf Olsen
Kåre Kristoffersen
Oddbjørn Fikstveit
- ❖ FATLAND ØLEN:
Ole Døvik
Hilde Håland
Jane Espevoll
- ❖ FATLAND ULL LOFOTEN:
Roger Karlsen
Fay Renee Johansen
- ❖ NORILIA GOL:
Stein Terje Moen
Kjell Ove Brenna
Kjell Raunedokken
Oddvar Ellseth
Kia Gabrielsson
Frida Zwanenburg
Hassan Abdifatah Isak
Line Trones
Damian Mazur
Sanja Markoska
Weiuye Situ
Michal Cichon
- ❖ BIOFORSK:
Lise Grøva
- ❖ LYGHEISENTERET:
Torhild Kvingedal
- ❖ NORILIA OSLO:
Tony Barman
Beth Borch
- ❖ LANDBRUKSDIREKTORATET:
Ingeborg Seip
- ❖ SELBU SPINNERI:
Ingvild S. Espelien
- ❖ SCANDINAVIAN BUSINESS
SEATING
Pernille Jensen Stoltze
- ❖ John Gerhard Håkull (privat)
- ❖ Venche Berit Bollestad (privat)
- ❖ Anette Wessel-Berg (privat)
- ❖ Sonia Bush, Sverige (privat)
- ❖ Roger Haugard Bush, Sverige (privat)
- ❖ Kursleder: Sissel Berntsen,
Fagtjenesten for ull, ANIMALIA
- ❖ Tone Tobiasson nicefashion.org and
Ingun G. Klepp SIFO
- ❖ Anne Grete Stabekk NSG
- ❖ Arnstein Digernes and Arild Sletta
Rauma Ullvarefabrikk
- ❖ Grethe Ringdal ANIMALIA
- ❖ Louise White and Chris Prescott
WTAE