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## Awassi Sheep Production Systems and Feeding Strategies in Syria

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### Abstract

In Syria sheep are an important source of income due to the large proportion (55 %) of semi-arid areas with less than 300 mm average annual rainfall. The 11.5 million heads of Awassi sheep (the only sheep breed kept) contributes 78 %, 30 % and 100 % of the country's total red meat, milk and wool production, respectively (FAO, 2006). The objectives of this study are to analyse production systems of Awassi sheep in Syria and to identify the feeding strategies.

A study was carried out during summer 2006 and 2007, involving 105 sheep keepers of four different eco-zones through individual questionnaire guided interviews. Grazing of rangeland and crop residues is the main activity and feed resource across the eco-zones. Supplementation of concentrates is becoming increasingly necessary to maintain feeding levels over expending periods of the year. Grain barely, bran and cotton cake are most important in all study areas (91 %, 98 % and 98 %, correspondingly). Maize is often used in southern area (27.3 %) compared with 3.9 %, 5.4 % and 0 % in the northern, middle and eastern region. Cotton seed is used in all areas (35 %, 23.1 %, 13.6 %, and 13.5 % in eastern, middle, southern, and northern area, respectively). The use of dried bread is increasingly common in the eastern area (35 %) compared to 9.1 %, 3.9 %, and 2.7 % in the southern, middle and northern area. Purchase of feed from government sources and general markets (96 % of sheep keeper) is the main access to feed, but 57 % of the sheep keepers do also cultivate barley or wheat to produce some additional feeds. The negative trend in availability of rangeland and crop residues does increase the demand for concentrate supplementation which links the sheep industry in Syria to the effects of globalisation in feed trade .

**Keywords:** Concentrate feed, feed resources, sheep production, Syria