

Karakul Centenary

This year marks the centenary celebration of Karakul in Namibia. The first consignment consisting of ten ewes and two rams arrived in South West Africa from Germany on 24 September 1907. The year 1914 saw the arrival of another 100 rams, 580 ewes and 140 lambs which constituted the core stock of the unique sheep breed which acclimatized optimally to local conditions. The Karakul has since played a significant role in the development and economy of the country. Marketed under the brand name SWAKARA since 1966, it is synonymous with uniqueness and quality in the international pelt trade.

The 1960s and 1970s were known as the golden years in the karakul industry with the export of more than 5 million pelts annually. Although the 1990s saw a set back and dramatic decrease in pelt numbers, the industry has since recuperated and contributes substantially to Namibia's economic and social development.

The karakul pelt is currently one of the most popular pelts in the international market and record prices for pelts were attained as recently as auctions held in April and September last year.

The centenary will not go unmarked and various projects are planned by the Karakul Board including:

- A television documentary on Karakul's 100 year existence in Namibia;

- A centenary publication chronicling the history of Karakul through images and interviews;

- The unveiling of a statue of a shepherd with a lamb and a ram on 13 September 2007 in Keetmanshoop to coincide with the Annual General Meeting of the Karakul Producer's Association. The unveiling will feature performances by various choirs and school processions through the streets of Keetmanshoop;

- Select international clients and a number of local producers accompanied by their spouses will be treated to a lavish cruise in the fjords of Copenhagen. A 'golden lamb' and other special awards will be made to clients at the event;

- The recent local karakul weavers competition for a wall hanging depicting the centenary saw Ebenstein Weavers awarded the first prize. One of the hangings has been earmarked for State House in Windhoek, whilst the other two will grace the offices of Copenhagen Fur and the Karakul Board respectively;

- A prestigious dinner will be held for producers in Keetmanshoop on 13 September 2007 with guests of honour including the President of Namibia and the Minister of Agriculture; and.

- An event featuring the designer of ERFA fashion, Bente Anderson from Hamburg who will talk about the latest fashion trends, will be organized for the ladies.

The final program and further information regarding the Centenary will be made available to all producers in the near future.

Agra, the sole marketer of the karakul pelt internationally, features prominently in the celebrations; in addition to numerous sponsorships for various events the Co-operative has agreed to a 0.25% rebate on its commission for the auction in April. This alone could amount to N\$ 60,000.

Agra congratulates all producers on this memorable milestone in the industry's history; may the future be prosperous and "Black Diamond" go from strength to strength.