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FLOCK STRUCTURE, LEVEL OF PRODUCTION, AND MARKETING OF SHEEP RAISED UNDER NEW VALLEY OASES FARMING SYSTEMS.

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to recognize the sheep flock composition, productivity, and marketing in two oases (Daghla and Farafra) located in the Egyptian western desert, New Valley. A set of semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect information from 243 sheep owners based on single-visit-interviews. The study indicates that households in Daghla oasis own higher number of cattle per herd; this may be due to relatively larger land holdings and more land allocation for green fodder in this area. On the other hand, sheep production is the major livestock activity within Farafra oasis. In terms of sex structure, about 74% of sheep owned are females and 26% are males. Breeding females represent the larger proportion while the second largest group is those at suckling age in Farafra flocks and ewe lambs in Daghla flocks. The prevailing sheep breeds raised in the study areas are fat tail sheep in Daghla flocks and thin tail sheep in Farafra flocks. The average litter size and weaning weight of fat tail sheep were found to be 1.22 and 12.2 kg, respectively. The corresponding values for thin tail sheep were 1.37and 17.4 kg, respectively. Higher lamb mortality rates (17%) were estimated for Daghla flocks but the figures were lower (9%) in Farafra flocks. For other traits such as age at first lambing, lambing interval and age at marketing, no significant differences in performance were observed among sheep of the two Oases. In average, females in the study areas give first birth at age 1.3 years and lambed every 8.6 months. In all studied areas, sheep were sold mainly at the farm gate when money is needed to buy farm inputs. It is concluded that the level of production of sheep in the studied areas is generally low. Lamb mortality rates, especially in Daghla flocks, should be also reduced in order to make sheep production profitable and sustainable.

Keywords: *flock composition, sheep, productivity*