

# ENHANCING THE VALUE OF NATIVE BREEDS: QUALITY KEYS



1. Cows and calves of "Greek Red" Breed in a forest meadow on Mount Tymfristos Photo V. Lappa 2. Greek indigenous cattle breed of Kea island, Photo A. Pantera 3. Cattle of "Vrahikeratiki" breed and goats of the "Greek Indigenous" breed Photo G. Bakogiorgos 4. Greek mixed-haired and fine-tailed sheep (Topoliana village) Photo G. Bakogiorgos

## WHAT AND WHY

During the 20th century, farmers largely replaced traditional livestock with high-yielding breeds that produced more milk and meat. However, these animals required more feed and were often more susceptible to diseases and health issues.

In recent years, many producers have begun returning to indigenous (local) breeds. While these animals may not produce as much, they are highly adapted to challenging environments, such as extreme temperatures, water scarcity, poor grazing conditions, and steep or mountainous terrain. They are also naturally resistant to parasitic, infectious, and metabolic diseases.

Because of their adaptability, local breeds make efficient use of their surroundings and gradually shape the rural landscape, particularly in mountainous regions. Although their yields are lower, they offer unique product quality and lower production costs, making them a sustainable and valuable choice for the future.

## HOW THE CHALLENGE IS ADDRESSED

The milk and meat from local breeds typically have a better fatty acid profile, greater oxidative stability, and a more pleasant aroma and flavor. These qualities make them ideal for traditional recipes and high-quality local products such as cheeses, yoghurts, and sausages, which often hold strong commercial value.

By aligning the goals of both producers and consumers, the growing demand for quality food can support the development of semi-extensive livestock systems and encourage the conservation of local breeds. This approach not only helps supply local markets and urban areas with premium products but also ensures a stable and satisfactory income for farmers.

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## ADVANTAGES

Native breeds also carry a rich genetic heritage shaped by centuries of natural selection. These genes regulate how animals interact with their environment—managing the flow of matter and energy—and are essential to their continued adaptation and survival under diverse and often harsh conditions.

This long-term adaptation has enabled native breeds to produce high-quality products even in poor habitats and under harsh conditions. Today, these products are increasingly in demand in both local markets and urban areas, as modern consumers seek food that combines health benefits with excellent taste, tenderness, aroma, visual appeal, and affordability. In addition, many tourists, particularly in mountainous regions during weekends and holidays, are drawn to rural settlements specifically to experience traditional recipes and local specialties. This growing interest further strengthens the connection between sustainable livestock farming, cultural heritage, and local economic development.

These high-quality products come from animals of local breeds that are raised semi-extensively on natural pastures across the countryside. For example, the rich sheep's milk produced in the Agrafa and Velouchi regions is used to make the soft PDO cheese Tsalafouti. The meat of the native cattle breed Vrachykeratiki is ideal for producing premium, low-fat deli meats and commands high market prices. Similarly, lamb raised in the mountainous southern edge of the Pindus range yields meat that is rich in polyunsaturated fatty acids, highly stable against oxidation, and free from residues of industrial or chemical pollutants. These products already enjoy an excellent reputation and deserve a distinct and valued place in the market. To ensure they are fairly priced and accessible to more consumers, the state must support producers by providing capital, technical know-how, and the right incentives. This support is essential if small-scale farmers are to succeed in an increasingly competitive market.

Traditional livestock farming also plays a vital role in preserving both biodiversity and the natural landscape. Moreover, the improved use of pasture through grazing by native breeds leads to lower production costs and reduces dependence on concentrated animal feed, contributing to a more self-sufficient and environmentally friendly farming system.

## HIGHLIGHTS:

- **Conservation of Biodiversity and Landscape:** Native animals play a vital role in maintaining ecological balance and preserving traditional rural landscapes.
- **Efficient Use of Marginal Land:** Indigenous breeds are well adapted to poor or harsh habitats, making productive use of land that is unsuitable for intensive farming.
- **Production of High-Quality Products:** These breeds provide milk and meat with exceptional nutritional and sensory qualities, forming the basis of valuable traditional and local products.



Lamb of "Katsena" ("Kefallinias") breed Photo G. Bakogiorgos

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