

Romania: Where there is Wool there is a Way

Romania is the largest producer of wool in Europe post-Brexit. Once upon a time, coarse Romania wool was processed into carpets but those factories, along with international buyers, have disappeared. Romanian farmers making a profit from their wool, is a nearly forgotten fairy tale.



KAITLYN GISLER
CONTRIBUTOR TO
EWE FOUNDATION



To make the situation more challenging, the European Union (EU) decreed sheared wool, left on a farm, as a waste product. If a farmer wishes to transport sheared wool off their farm themselves, they need to get a special waste management license. These economic and bureaucratic hurdles result in 90% of all shorn wool in Romania piling up on farms. These heaps of forgotten fibre pollute the environment by leaching excessive concentrations of nitrogen, carbon and other elements into waterways.

This unused wool problem plagues all of Europe, and to most onlookers, seems unsolvable, unless you are Cristian Mercioniu, Founder of Eco PartnerSheep Insulation SA. If you are Mercioniu, you look around your country and think:

“people are ignoring one of the best resources on this planet,” and then you get to work.

Mercioniu's interest in Romanian wool was first piqued when considering insulation used in construction, something he looks and thinks about a lot with his 22 years in real-estate and development. He sensed an opportunity. Mercioniu's in-laws also had roots in the wool industry before Communism swept their country and closed their factories.

“Look around your house,” says Mercioniu, “and see what is made in Europe: almost nothing. That's a problem. We need to become independent in our production and here is an opportunity to do that.”

This production plant is allowing Mercioniu and his team to process all of Romania's wool, in Romania, and sell natural wool products across Europe. According to Mercioniu, 11 million sheep are producing 40,000 tonnes of wool per year, so there is a lot of work ahead.

In May 2024, Mercioniu finalized the ordering of machines to process the wool. He anticipates the installation of these machines second part of 2025 in the soon-to-be-built 12,150 square meter wool processing factory. In 2025, expect to see Eco PartnerSheep Insulation products near you: wool pellets in your favourite garden center, wool insulation in the hardware store, or lanolin in a variety of products you get from your pharmacy.

TOPIC: WOOL PROCESSING

Until now, Romanian farmers paid, collectively, around 22 million euros to shear their sheep, and the shorn wool has not covered their shearing costs for decades. Mercioniu and his team coordinates 1,000 workers over two months to shear Romanian sheep, organize wool collection points, and coordinate transportation. The wool is currently hauled to a smaller processing factory while the scale-up facility is being built. The farmers pay nothing for the shearing, collection, transport and processing of their wool, these costs are all paid for by Eco PartnerSheep Insulation SA.

“It’s a huge effort,” says Mercioniu, “but this is good for the farmers and for the company to secure source.”

What was classified as an agricultural waste by the EU, is now handled by Mercioniu’s team, and is classified as a raw material to be processed into a product. Eco PartnerSheep Insulation is not shackled with the waste license that a farmer would be, if they attempted to remove their wool off-farm themselves.

The new facility is also planned to have 20,000 square meters of wool storage beside it, and altogether allows for the processing of 25,000 tonnes annually, with the idea of processing 100 tonnes per day, 340 working days per year.

“Forty to 50,000 people are impacted directly,” says Mercioniu. “The new factory will employ 240 people, we employ 1,000 shearers annually, we work alongside farming associations and of course farms, then there are the transporters, and the suppliers that make the machines we need. This has a good impact on Romanian society, economy and the environment.”

Scouring (washing) is one of the most intensive steps in wool processing, but Mercioniu has approached this holistically.



Wool is washed with no chemicals, allowing the water to be treated onsite and reused. In the new factory, rain water will be collected, moisture will be collected from the heated drying rooms and added back to the scouring system. The factory will be powered with green electricity also from solar panels.

Mercioniu is thrilled with their current and future product lineup, starting with insulation. He is also in discussions with the automotive industry, for soundproofing and thermal insulation in vehicles.

“Wool insulation has better quality and characteristics than synthetic insulation,” says Mercioniu, “and it’s human friendly as we don’t add chemicals.”

Mercioniu anticipates producing 7,000-10,000 tonnes of wool pellets per year. The pellets give him a unique opportunity to repurpose the unusable vegetation matter found in all wool.

“It’s a zero-waste factory which makes it profitable and feasible. After washing you lose 40-50% of the wool. If we just produced insulation we would have a loss.”

The final product Mercioniu and his team is enthused about is lanolin extraction. Romanian wool has a high percent of lanolin and Romanian farmers do not use pesticides on their wool for the treatment of parasites, instead they use an internally administered medication. Mercioniu believes that no one in Europe is extracting lanolin at the scale of the factory and Eco PartnerSheep Insulation estimates they will manage to extract 3000 tonnes of lanolin per year. Looking to the future, Mercioniu is optimistic about the sub-products derived from lanolin: cholesterol, vitamin D3 and keratin will also be produced in the factory.

Also, in 2026 Mercioniu and his team expect to start gathering wool from neighbouring countries in Europe and process this wool in the new factory.

“We can solve the wool waste problem in Europe in the next five years,” says Mercioniu.

The EWE Foundation will be celebrating alongside EcoPartnerSheep, especially with Mercioniu’s invitation to host a future European Wool Day at his soon-to-be-built wool processing facility.