

Mary Wore a Little Lamb

The Truth about Karakul Lamb Fur



Investigator's Log

(Warning: the following firsthand description is graphic and disturbing.)

"We were taken on a tour of a karakul farm and slaughter facility outside Bukhara, Uzbekistan. As we entered the slaughterhouse, we could hear what sounded like the cries of lambs.

A worker was skinning a dead lamb that was hanging from a hook. Against the far wall was a pile of about twelve dead lambs.



HSUS investigators noted the strong bonds between karakul ewes and their lambs.

Newborn lambs must be killed within one to three days of their birth. Small, frail, and barely able to stand, they are fully conscious when their throats are slit. After they are skinned, their bodies are discarded, too small to be of any use for food.

Later, we witnessed the slaughter of a pregnant ewe. She was held down, her throat slit open and stomach slashed wide to remove the developing fetus—the 'raw material' for broadtail fur fashions. Approximately two minutes after the sheep's throat was cut, the workers picked up the now headless body by the legs and placed it on a wooden, cradle-

like structure. We saw vigorous movements in the dead sheep's abdomen, evidently the unborn lamb kicking. Workers pushed on the sheep's abdomen several times. There was no further visible movement. About thirty seconds after the movement in the sheep's abdomen was no longer visible, the workers shackled and hoisted the sheep's body and started skinning it. After the skin was removed, another worker tore open the uterus and pulled out the lamb, holding it up for us to see. The worker then tossed the lamb fetus onto the floor, and we left the kill area."

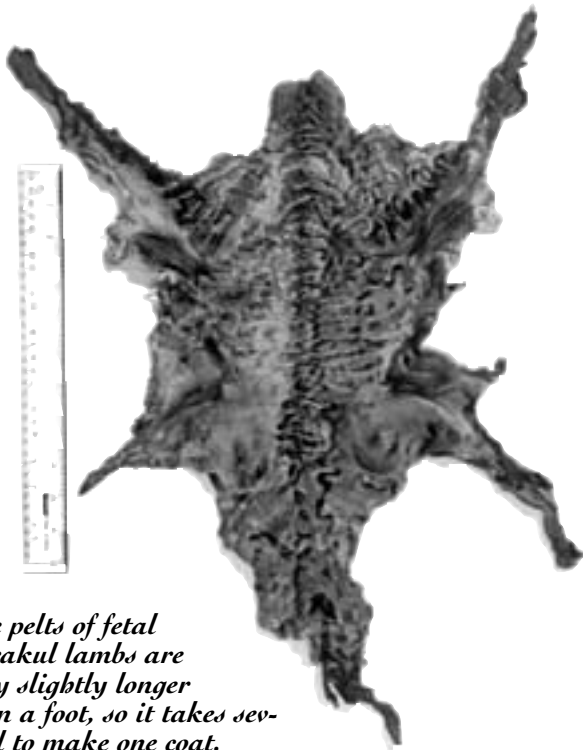
This particular farm housed about 10,500 sheep and slaughtered several hundred each week.

Our investigator's hand caresses the tiny body of a newborn karakul lamb. The lambs are slaughtered soon after birth before their valuable curls start to unravel.



What are karakul sheep?

- Karakuls are a specific breed of sheep, known for their distinctive fur. They are not generally raised as meat animals; their value lies in their coats.
- The sheep are bred and slaughtered for their fur in Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Namibia, South Africa, Uzbekistan, and other countries in Central Asia. Although there are some breeders in the United States, they raise the sheep as a hobby and don't kill them for their fur.
- The sheep possess a strong flocking instinct, and the ewes are protective and attentive mothers. [Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) investigators noted the strong bonds between ewes and their lambs throughout the investigation.]



The pelts of fetal karakul lambs are only slightly longer than a foot, so it takes several to make one coat.



The fur of fetal karakul lambs (left) is lightweight, flat, wavy, and luminous, while that of newborn lambs (below) is tightly curled. Fetal fur usually commands a higher price.



What is karakul lamb fur?

- The textures, patterns, and colors of the coats of karakul lambs are unique among breeds of sheep, and the texture varies depending on the age of the lamb. Lambs are born with glossy, tightly curled fur, but within a few days, the curls begin to unravel—and to lose some of their monetary value. That's why the lambs are slaughtered so soon after birth. The fur of fetal lambs is lightweight and flat. Lacking curls but having a wavy texture and luminous sheen, the fur is often described as resembling watered silk or moiré. This fur, obtained from lambs up to about fifteen days before birth, usually commands a higher price than that of newborns, though trends in fashion dictate which is most popular from season to season.
- To retain all of the fur's special qualities, the lambs are slaughtered and skinned, rather than simply sheared (as sheep are for wool), so that the pelts remain intact.
- The fur is not produced as a by-product of the meat or wool industries. Though the flesh of slaughtered adult sheep is sometimes eaten, the meat is essentially a by-product of the fur industry. And there is not enough flesh on the fetal and newborn lambs to be used for food—their little bodies are simply thrown away as garbage.

- The fur goes by a variety of names. Fur from both fetal and newborn lambs is sometimes called karakul. Fetal lamb fur is commonly known as broadtail, and fur from newborns is frequently referred to as Persian lamb. Other names include caracul, karakulcha, cha, breitschwanz, swakara, namikara, nakara, astrakhan, agnello di persia, and krimmer.
- Karakul lamb fur is a significant component of the fur industry as a whole, with pelt production about on par with that of fox fur. According to industry reports, four to five million karakul lambs are killed each year for their pelts. The actual death toll, of course, is much higher, because for each fetal pelt, two animals must die—the mother and her unborn lamb.
- Fur from karakul lambs is used for coats, jackets, skirts, pants, dresses, and trims on all types of garments. The retail value of a karakul lamb garment varies according to the age of the lamb when killed. Fetal fur is the most expensive in terms of production—in part because two animals must die to make one pelt—and garments can cost more than

\$25,000. A coat made from newborn lambs may cost \$5,000 to \$12,000. Designers using karakul lamb fur include Christian Dior, Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci, Carolina Herrera, Michael Kors, Karl Lagerfeld, Ralph Lauren, Prada, and Valentino. High-end department stores and boutiques across the United States carry karakul lamb fur garments.



Karakul lamb fur can be found as coats, skirts, pants, dresses, and trims on all types of garments. A karakul lamb garment can cost more than \$25,000.

- Because the lambs are so tiny when slaughtered, dozens of them die to produce a full-length garment. HSUS investigators counted thirty lamb pelts sewn together on one coat.

What are the fur industry myths, and what is the truth?

- Fur industry manuals have described fetal karakul lamb fur as the pelts of lambs born prematurely due to accident or exposure. The HSUS investigation proves that pregnant ewes are killed, and their lambs taken from them as many as fifteen days before their natural birth.
- Even the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) helped perpetuate the myths that mask the cruelty behind karakul lamb fur. As long ago as 1954, material published by the FWS stated, “There is a widespread misconception that the ewes are maltreated or killed. Such practices are not humane or economically profitable anywhere.” The FWS was right about such practices being inhumane, but it was dead wrong otherwise. HSUS investigators witnessed pregnant ewes routinely and systematically slaughtered with-

out the use of prior stunning or any other humane slaughter technique. And while fetal lamb fur is indeed expensive to produce, the high price it commands makes it worth the death of the mother.

- Fashion writers also inaccurately report the source of karakul lamb. A review of an Alexander McQueen/Givenchy fashion show in the February 16, 2000, edition of London’s *Evening Standard* referred to fetal pelts as “byproducts of other industries rather than pelts farmed expressly for use in fashion.”

Victims of Fashion

Look in any fashion magazine and you’re likely to see it: a glossy, curly, flat fur that sometimes looks like crushed velvet. It may appear as trim on collars or cuffs or as a complete jacket, coat, or other garment. And it’s known by a host of names—karakul lamb, or more commonly, broadtail or Persian lamb. What isn’t commonly known is that this fur is the product of extreme cruelty.

This particular kind of fur, so prized as a luxury item, can be produced in only one way: By killing and skinning lambs who are only a few days, or a few hours, old—and even unborn lambs who are literally ripped from their mothers’ wombs. Their tiny pelts are then turned into “fashion.”

Undercover investigators from The HSUS spent twelve months documenting the source of this fur and debunking the myths perpetrated by the fur industry.



A model sports a karakul lamb coat, part of a fashion designer’s collection.