



Wool at the Crossroads: Addressing Challenges and Building Resilience in Karnataka

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ABSTRACT

Karnataka possesses considerable potential in the wool industry due to its large sheep population and deep-rooted rural craftsmanship. Despite this, the sector encounters numerous obstacles in marketing and adding value to wool products. These include low price realization, insufficient branding, and limited digital presence. This paper examines the key hurdles faced by wool producers and traders in Karnataka and presents sustainable, innovative approaches involving technology, cooperatives, and policy support to rejuvenate the sector.

Keywords: Wool Sector, Karnataka, Rural Development, Marketing Barriers, Wool Cooperatives, Sustainability, E-Commerce

1. Introduction

With its agricultural richness and diverse rural economy, Karnataka is a prominent state for sheep rearing in India. Key districts such as Ballari, Koppal, Raichur, and Chitradurga are notable for wool production. However, the wool industry remains mostly unorganized, suffering from outdated marketing methods, lack of value-enhancing processes, and poor connectivity to wider markets. As a result, rural producers face challenges in securing stable incomes.

2. Current Status of the Wool Sector in Karnataka

- Karnataka is among the top Indian states in terms of sheep numbers, producing significant quantities of raw wool.
- The main outputs include raw wool, handmade blankets, shawls, and traditional rugs known locally as kambli.
- Production is concentrated in districts like Ballari, Bagalkot, Koppal, and northern Karnataka, and Chitradurga.
- The sector provides employment to thousands of rural households, particularly from underprivileged and nomadic backgrounds.

3. Major Marketing Challenges

3.1. Lack of Structured Market Networks

- Wool transactions are dominated by intermediaries, leading to minimal earnings for farmers.
- Producers have limited influence on pricing and product assessment.

3.2. Deficient Branding and Visibility

- There is no distinct identity or branding for Karnataka wool in broader markets.
- Consumers are largely unaware of the distinctiveness of these products.

3.3. Infrastructure Gaps

- The state lacks advanced facilities for wool processing, such as scouring, dyeing, and spinning.

- Inadequate transport and storage infrastructure hamper efficiency.

3.4. Minimal Value Addition

- Much of the wool is sold in raw form without conversion into value-added products.
- Local artisans often lack training in modern techniques and consumer preferences.

3.5. Limited Digital Access

- Producers are mostly unfamiliar with online marketplaces, digital payments, and promotional tools.
- There is no significant participation on platforms like Amazon Karigar or Flipkart Samarth.

4. Strategic Recommendations

4.1. Formation of Wool Cooperatives and FPOs

- Establish wool-focused cooperatives or Farmer Producer Organizations to improve collective marketing.
- Enable better price negotiation and direct access to markets.

4.2. Branding and Certification Initiatives

- Introduce geographical indications (GI) or quality certifications for Karnataka wool products.
- Position them as environmentally sustainable, artisan-made items.

4.3. Enhanced Government Participation

- Tap into schemes offered by KVIC, MSME, NABARD, and the Ministry of Textiles for financial and skill support.
- Provide infrastructure and training assistance to local producers.

4.4. Skill Development and Innovation

- Organize training programs in contemporary weaving, color processing, and digital skills.
- Partner with NGOs and design institutions for capacity building.

4.5. Embracing E-Commerce and Online Promotion

- Support onboarding of rural producers to online platforms and digital stores.
- Train youth in photography, online customer engagement, and social media use.

5. Conclusion

Karnataka's wool sector holds significant promise for uplifting rural livelihoods. By addressing key challenges related to marketing, infrastructure, branding, and digital inclusion, the industry can evolve into a major contributor to the state's rural economy. Empowering local producers through knowledge, technology, and institutional support will be essential to unlocking this potential.

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