Mohair: Is it Wool or Hair?

By Professor J. E. Du RIBDEN, Ph.D., M.Sc., and Miss M. Ross SPENCER, B.Sc.,
Rhodes University College, Grahamstown.

In separate spiral tufts or staples, which vary much in size and in the tightness of the spiral in different kids. Careful examination shows that under these fibres, and intermingled with them, is a sparse covering of fine, non-medullated, wool fibres. The discovery of these suffices to prove that the main covering of the Angora kid corresponds with the outer or kempy coat of the wild sheep, and the scant under-covering with the woolly coat.

The Angora Coat.

But what of the later coat of the Angora? At first sight it would appear to be a continuation of the outer coat of the kid, the spiral tufts wool in its origin and relationship to all other fibres.

The Angora, however, resembles most woolled sheep in that it has not entirely lost its outer coat of coarse hair, the kemp, even in the adult. Most Angoras still show a certain number of short kempy fibres, which are really renewals of the kemp present in the kid; only the best-bred goats are free of objectionable fibres, in the same manner as are the best-bred Merinos. It can only be got rid of by selection in breeding. It is an ancestral legacy which appears in the early kid, and tends to be continued into the later fleece. Kemp is shed at least annually, while the wool fibres becomes the ringlets. This, however, is not the case. Soon after birth the kemp fibres begin to be shed, and the wool fibres underneath grow upwards and take their place, and ultimately form the ringlets. All stages in the replacement of the coarse outer fibres by the fine under-wool fibres can be traced in the coat of kids from the first month or so onwards, until ultimately the staples are practically all wool. Thus, the adult coat of the Angora is formed of the same fibres as those which constitute the fleece of the woolled sheep. From a zoological point of view, the conclusion is reached that mohair is truly tend to grow continuously without being shed.

Mohair a Specific Name.

In the estimation of the manufacturer the special qualities of mohair—length, strength, lustre, and feelness of serrations—serve to distinguish it from Merino wool, and he employs it for special needs. It is well that it should retain its specific name of mohair. But in no sense, neither in its origin nor use, can it be regarded as hair; this term can in all strictness be applied to kemp, which is the endeavour of every Angora breeder to eliminate.