

The Nordic sheep breeds



Nordic sheep breeds

- We have had sheep in the Nordic countries for as long as we have had agriculture.
- The earliest farmers in Europe (Neolithic age, 5-6000 years ago) are believed to have brought short-tailed sheep.
- The sheep were (as far as we know) small, double-coated, naturally molting, and mainly brown.



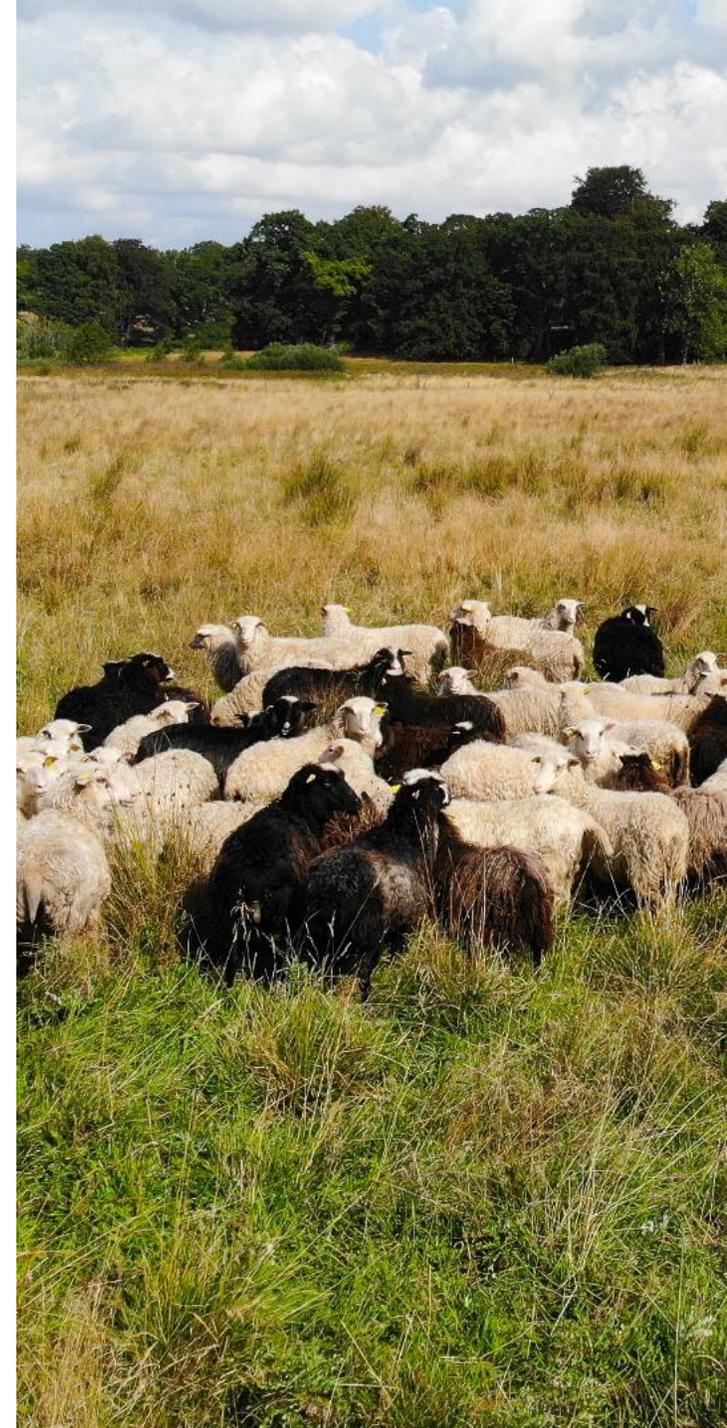
Nordic sheep breeds

- By the iron age, sheep were evolved to a somewhat larger sheep, still short-tailed, with a more uniform textured fleece and more colour variation.
- The Northern European short-tailed sheep is a group of sheep that has ancestry to these first sheep.
- Sheep brought later from southern Europe were larger, long-tailed, single-coated («crossbred») wool.

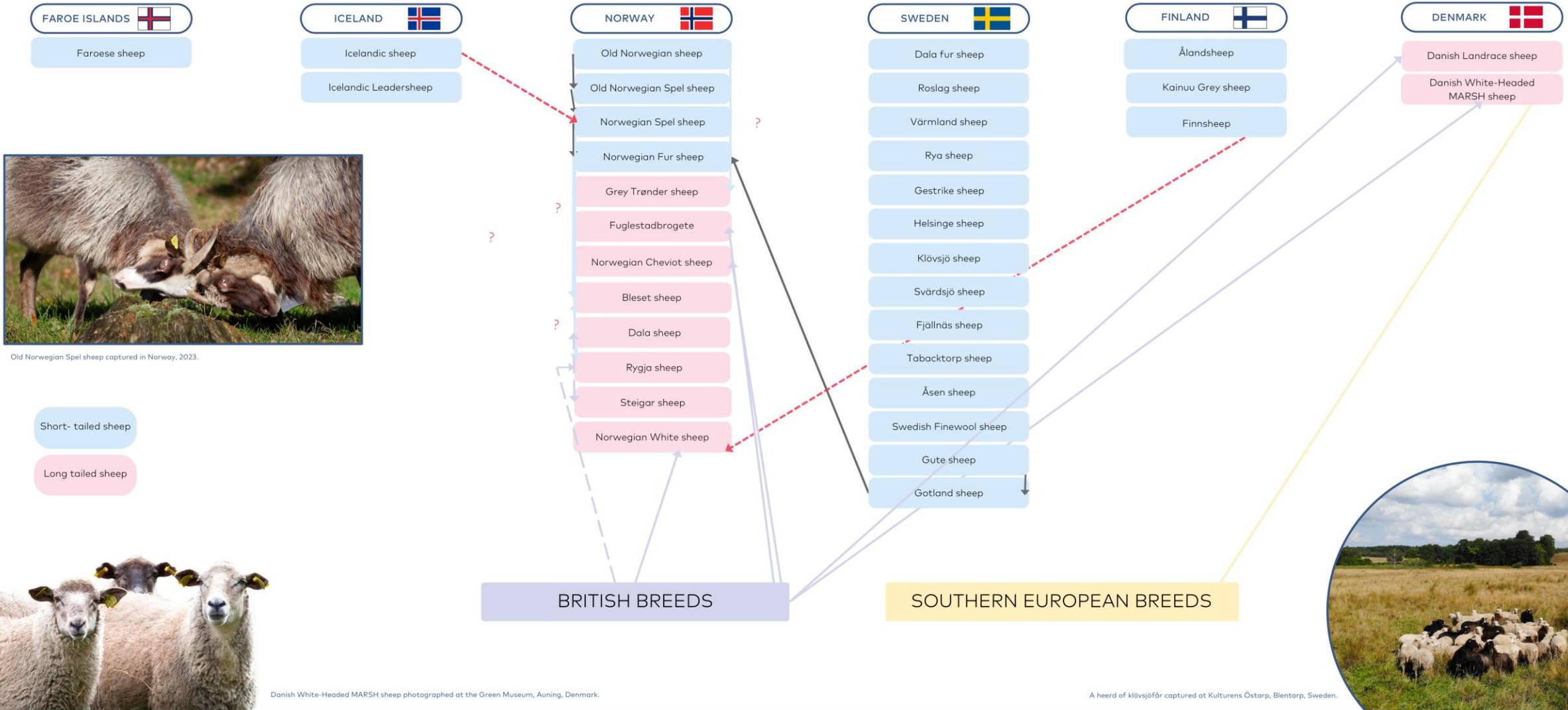


Nordic sheep breeds

- In the Nordic countries today, we have 34 sheep breeds that are considered native and/or worthy of conservation.
- These are both long- and short tailed, with different types of sheep fleeces, colours and sizes.



NORTHERN EUROPEAN SHORT TAIL SHEEP

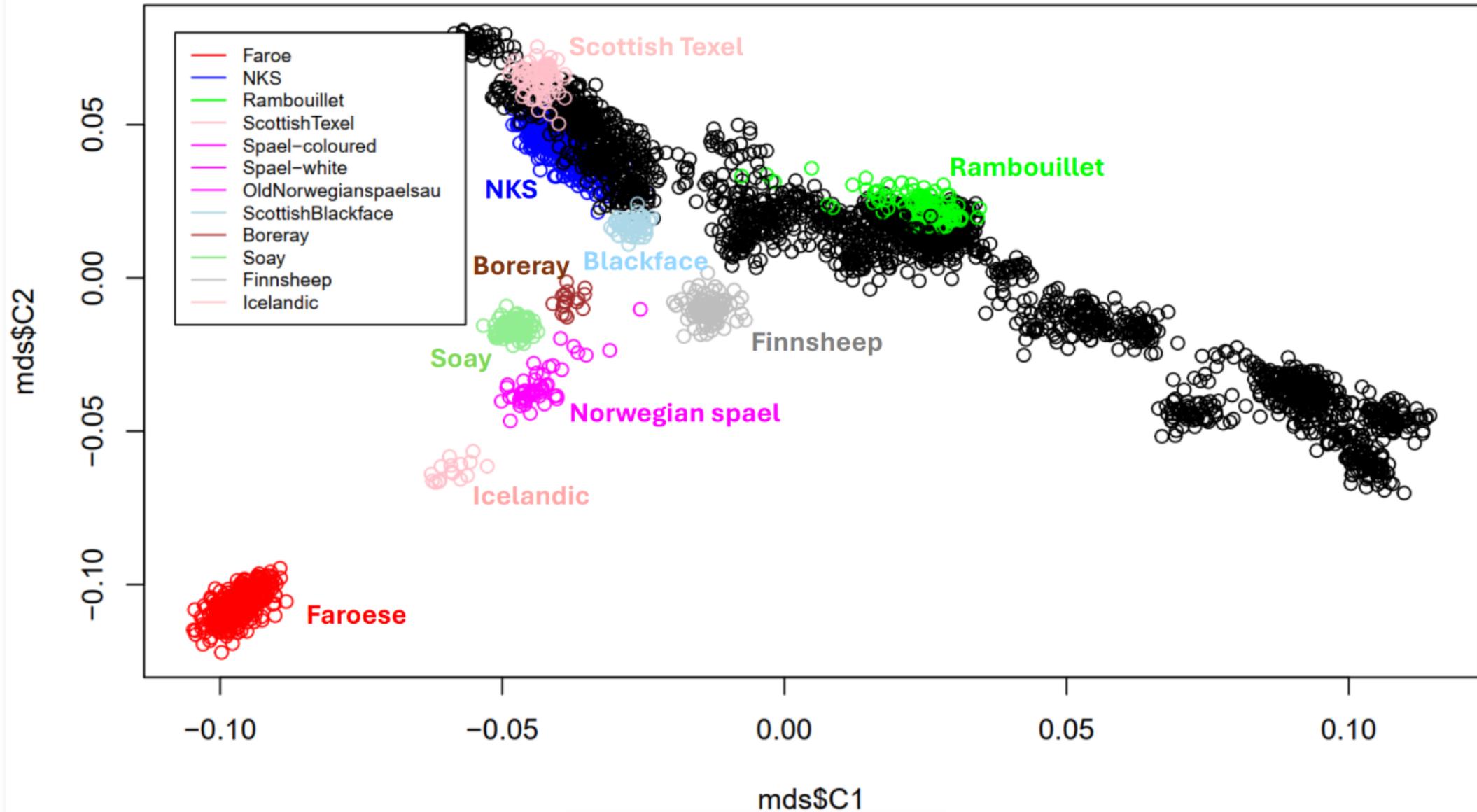


Faroese sheep

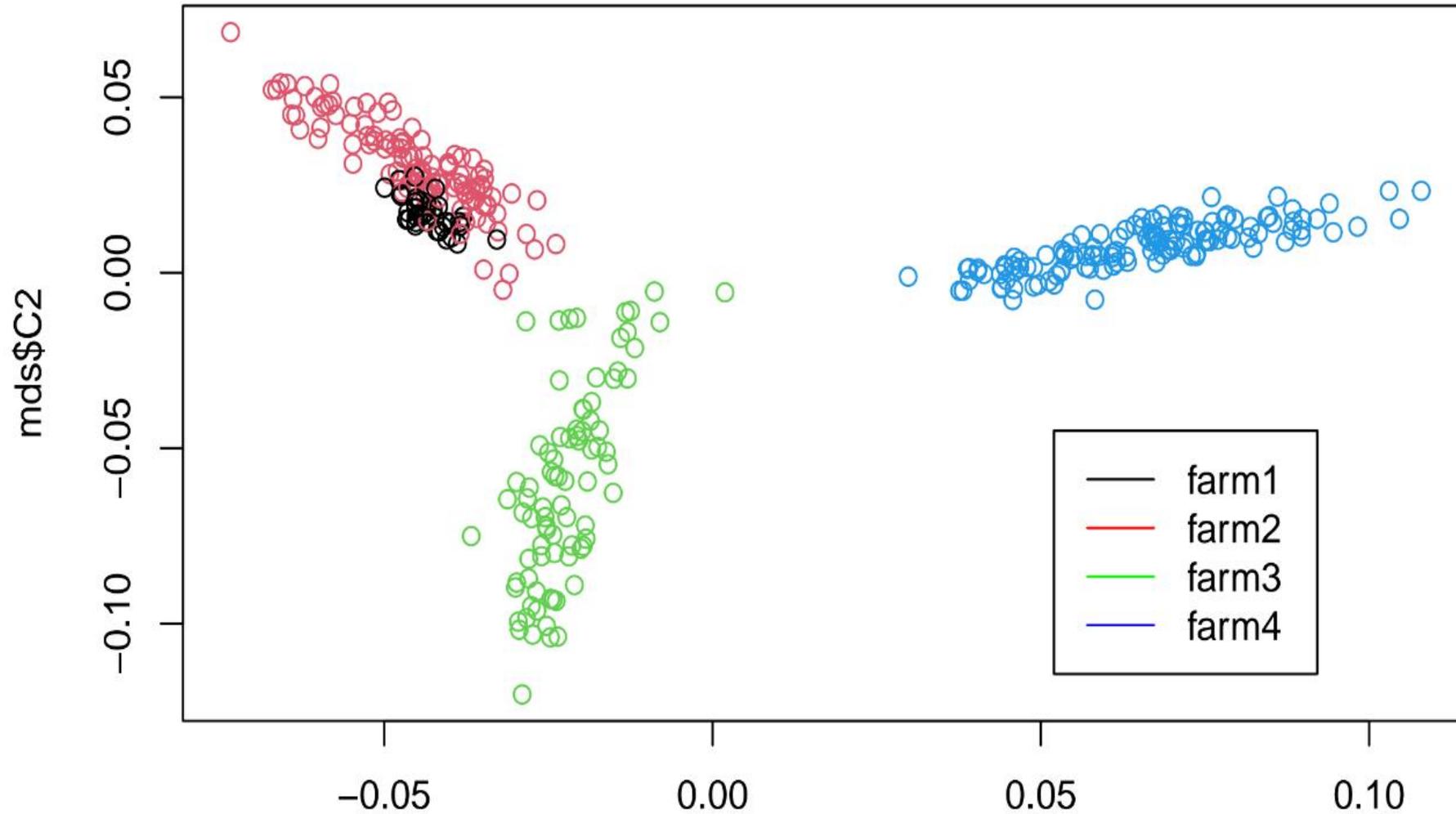
- One breed
- 70 - 75 000 ewes – Not at risk
- Short-tailed
- Double coat
 - Natural shedding in some (But mostly sheared so unknown how many).



Faroese sheep



Faroese sheep



Icelandic sheep

- Two recognized breeds:
 - Icelandic sheep (345 000 – Not at risk)
 - Leader sheep (1200 – Endangered)
- There is also one Pelt /Fur sheep type (3-400 animals)
- Short-tailed
- Double coat
- Shedding?



Icelandic sheep



Leader sheep

Norwegian sheep

— Short tailed

- Old Norwegian sheep (14 076 – Not at risk)
 - «Wild sheep» or «Outdoor sheep»
 - Old Norwegian Spel sheep (13 477 – Not at risk)
 - Norwegian (white) Spel sheep (55 356 – Not at risk)
 - White and coloured Spel were separated and are still by some farmers, but now considered one breed.
 - Under modern breeding selection (Breeding indices)
 - Norwegian Fur / Pelt sheep (9487 – Not at risk)
 - Related to Gotland sheep
- «Spel» or «Spæl» refers to the type of wool – «Spel» wool – the overcoat /long wool

Gammelnorsk sau



Gammelnorsk
spælsau



Spælsau



Pelssau



Norwegian sheep

- Long tailed:
- Norwegian White Sheep: Main sheep breed (265 000 – Not at risk)
 - «Synthetic» breed
 - Bred on production traits and not appearance.
 - Mixed with foreign breeds but mainly based on three Norwegian breeds:
 - Dala sheep (908 – Endangered)
 - Rygja sheep (2717 – Endangered)
 - Steigar sheep (786 – Endangered)
 - «Pure» populations of these breeds still maintained.

Norwegian sheep

- Long tailed:
 - Grey Trønder sheep (1959 – Endangered)
 - Tail length between long and short
 - Fuglestadbrogete (1084 – Endangered)
 - Norwegian Cheviot sheep (2367 – Endangered)
 - Bleset sheep (3408 – Endangered (?))



Roslagsfår, Sweden
Photo: Liselotte Öhrling

Swedish sheep

- All short tailed sheep:
 - Dala fur sheep (470 – Endangered)
 - Roslag sheep (1069 – Endangered)
 - Varmland sheep (5331 – Vulnerable)
 - Rya sheep (2193 – Endangered)
 - Gestrike sheep (799 – Critical (?))

Gestrike sheep



Photo: Liselotte Öhrling

Swedish sheep

- Helsinge sheep (3518 – Endangered (?))
- Klovsjo sheep (2722 – Endangered)
- Svardsjo sheep (360 – Endangered)
- Fjallnas sheep (162 – Critical)
- Tabacktorp sheep (103 – Critical)



Gotland sheep, Sweden
Photo: Anna Johansson

Swedish sheep

- Asen sheep (1194 – Endangered)
- Swedish finewool sheep (4440 – Endangered (?))
- Gute sheep (4884 – Endangered (?))
- Gotland sheep (45 000 – Not at risk)



Rya sheep Sweden
Photo: Anna Johansson

Finnish sheep

- All short-tailed
- Finnish landrace sheep («Finnsheep») (11 000 ewes – Not at risk)
- Kainuu Grey sheep (1100 ewes – Endangered)
- Åland sheep (1050 ewes – Endangered)



Finnsheep, Finland
Photo: Mervi Honkatukia

Danish sheep

- Two breeds – both long-tailed
- Danish Landrase sheep (1326 – Endangered)
- Marsh sheep (886 – Endangered)

