

SHEEP INFORMATION

DID YOU KNOW???

- ❖ Sheep that produce wool are **sheared** (have their **fleece** shaved off) with electric clippers once a year. Shearing doesn't hurt the sheep at all; in fact, they like it!
- ❖ After the fleece is sheared, the wool is sorted to pull the best quality, then it is washed or **scoured**. It is then **carded** or untangled and straightened. After this, it can be dyed different colors and spun into yarn.
- ❖ You can tell how old a sheep is by counting its teeth. It gets two teeth each year for four years.

SHEEP VOCABULARY

clip – the measure of one year's wool production from a farm, state, country, etc.

herding dogs or sheepdogs – dogs such as border collies or Australian shepherds that have the job of herding, guiding, and moving the sheep

ewe – adult female or mother sheep

fleece – the wool of a sheep

flock – group of sheep

lamb – baby sheep; also the act of a sheep giving birth; and the meat of a sheep that is usually 4-6 months old

mutton – meat of an adult sheep

pelt – skin of a sheep with wool remaining attached

polled – animals without horns

ram – adult male or father sheep

shearing – shaving the sheep's wool fleece with electric clippers

wool – fiber covering on sheep

BY-PRODUCTS

Some sheep are raised for their meat. Others are raised for their wool. Besides wool, parts of sheep may be used to make these (as well as other) **by-products** or secondary products:

insulation

piano keys

candles

shampoo

fertilizer

chewing gum

medicines

A special oil in sheep's wool, called **lanolin**, is used to make lotions, make-up, and other things.

A Wolf, er, Kid in Sheep's Clothes

Sheep provide almost all of the **wool** we use to make clothing and blankets. Wool is an important **fiber** because it helps hold the warmth in when it's cold. Wool is used to make coats, sweaters, suits, socks, scarves, and so much more. Are you wearing anything made of wool today? If you are, thank a sheep!

MEASURE UP!

Wool is measured in many ways. Wool **yields** may be measured by weight, in **pounds** (lbs.). Yields are also measured in percentage, that is, the percentage of wool that is able to be used. The length of the wool is measured, too, in **centimeters** (cm.). Some sheep breeds are considered long wool, some are considered medium wool, and others are considered short wool, depending on the length of their wool fibers. The diameter of the wool fibers is also measured, that is, the thickness of one single fiber of wool. The diameter of wool is measured in units called **microns**.

Centimeters are one-*hundreth* of a meter. One centimeter is equal to a little more than 1/3 of an inch. Microns, also called micrometers, are one-*millionth* of a meter.

Question: Can you guess how we measure microns?

Answer: **Microns are measured by a microscope.**

Have you ever looked at human hair under a microscope? If you have, it's easy to see that some hair fibers are much thicker than others, just like with sheep!

LIVESTOCK LAUGHS

Where do sheep get their hair cut?
At the Baa-Baa Shop!

What do you call a sheep with no legs?
A cloud.

NOW SHOWING!!!

The following sheep breeds have shows during the NAILE!

SUFFOLKS

North American International **Suffolk** Show

Suffolks are the most popular sheep breed in the United States. These white sheep with black faces are a cross between the Southdown and Norfolk Horned breeds.

OXFORD

National **Oxford** Show

The **Oxford** breed is a cross between the Cotswold and the Hampshire. It is the second-heaviest breed of sheep (only the Lincoln weighs more).

MONTADALE

60th Anniversary E. H. Mattingly National **Montadale** Show

The **Montadale** is prized for its very white wool (*...its fleece was white as snow...*). The wool has very little lanolin in it, so more wool on its fleece can be used.

HAMPSHIRE

National **Hampshire** Show

Hampshires are named for a county in southern England. They are large and have a long face with very little wool on it. The area from their neck to their forehead, called the **woolcap**, is dark in color.

DORSETS

National **Horned Dorset** Show

National **Polled Dorset** Show

These medium-sized, all-white sheep are the second most popular breed in the U.S. Both varieties are showing today, one with horns, the other without. **Horned Dorsets** were developed when the Spanish brought Merino sheep to England, where they were crossed with the Horned Sheep of Wales. As you can tell from their names, these sheep had horns. **Polled Dorsets** were a mutation or genetic change in the original breed that occurred at North Carolina State College in the 1950s. Polled Dorsets are now more common than the horned variety.

SHROPSHIRE

National **Shropshire** Show

This English breed was known for its thick, short wool, said to go from “the tip of the nose to the tip of the toes.” It once had so much wool, however, that the sheep often suffered from “wool blindness,” when the wool covers the eyes too much. Through breeding, the **Shropshire** now has less wool and is popular once again. The Shropshire’s wool is very oily, an adaptation that helps it do well in cold, snowy climates.

BORDER CHEVIOT

Border Cheviot Show

Named for its place of origin, along the border of England and Scotland, the **Border Cheviot** has a white face, pricked ears, and a black muzzle and feet. Its face and legs are wool-free, but the long wool it does produce is special because of its **helical** crimp. That means that the wool fibers are **spiral** and, therefore, are able to spring back to shape when they are stretched.

SOUTHDOWN

National **Southdown** Show

The **Southdown** is named for the hills (the Brits call them “downs”) of Sussex, England. It has a fine, short wool, but it is also the oldest meat breed. It is recognizable for its “teddy-bear face,” that is a light mousy brown in color.

ROMNEY

Romney Show

This breed is popular in the U.S. and also in New Zealand. The **Romney** has a delicate meat flavor, but also has a great fleece (more microns than any other long wool breed!). The wool hangs in separate locks and has a uniform crimp, which means that the fibers have about the same curl to them. This makes it easy to spin, so Romney wool is a favorite of people who do **handspinning**. Romney wool makes terrific sweaters, carpets, and more.

LEICESTER

National **Border Leicester** Show

A long wool breed from England, the **Leicester** used to be the favorite wool of the wool carpet industry in the United States until the 1940s. The wool is long, curly, and lustrous (you know, kind of shiny in the light). Although we don’t make many wool carpets in this country anymore, Leicester wool is popular again because handspinners and crafters like it.

Question:

A famous man is thought to have brought the first Leicesters to America. Can you guess which one? Was it:

- a. Thomas Jefferson b. George Washington c. Jimmy Carter

Answer:

George Washington

Although all of these former presidents were farmers, George Washington is thought to have brought the first Leicesters to America. Washington raised 800 sheep on his Mount Vernon farm. He used Leicester rams, brought from England, to breed with other sheep he had, plus he kept a small purebred flock of Leicesters.

LINCOLNS

National **Lincoln** Show

Lincolns are a crossbreed of the native sheep of Lincolnshire England and another breed showing at the NAILE today: the Leicesters. Farmers in Idaho and Oregon raise a lot of them. Lincolns are, kind-of, record-setters; they are the largest breed of sheep, and they have the heaviest and coarsest wool. They also have one of the longest fleeces in the sheep world, with locks of wool that can be 8-15 inches long, with a spiral twist near the end. As the heaviest breed, Lincoln rams weigh 250-350 lbs. and ewes weigh 200-250 lbs.

COTSWOLD

National Cotswold Sheep Show

From Gloucester, England, this rather old breed is known for its long, white wool and dark-colored nose, ears, and hooves. Its name comes from two words that relate to the way it was raised centuries ago: it was housed in shelters called “cots” and pastured on the wild, treeless hills known as “wolds.”

RAMBOUILLET

Rambouillet Show

This breed was derived from the Merino breed, famous for its fine wool. Over 200 years ago, the Spanish government sent Merinos to the Rambouillet farm in Paris, to help improve French sheep breeds. These sheep are descended from this international cooperative effort.

TUNIS

North American Intl. Tunis Show

The Tunis is one of the oldest sheep breeds native to the United States. It all started in 1799, when the ruler of Tunisia sent sheep to America as a gift. (Tunisia is on the continent of Africa, between Algeria and Libya, and across the Mediterranean Sea from Italy.) This gift from Tunisia eventually became the Tunis breed – a cross of various African, Middle Eastern and European sheep. Thomas Jefferson was a big early fan of the breed. Tunis have creamy wool and copper-red faces and legs. The shape of their ears is called “pendulous” by breeders.

NATURAL COLORED SHEEP

National Natural Colored Show

The designation “natural colored” doesn’t refer to a specific breed of sheep, but several breeds. Basically, natural colored sheep are sheep that are not white. Thousands of years ago, all sheep were natural colored. Like many animals, their coats blended in with the colors of their native environment, to help protect them from predators. When the idea to dye wool different colors became popular, breeders began to want white sheep, rather than natural colored ones (white wool is easier to dye a whole variety of colors). Because of this, natural colored sheep became less common. Today, natural colored wools are desired by craftspeople who do handspinning, weaving and felting. The natural colors – which include black, gray, silver, brown, beige, red and blonde – are considered beautiful without adding dyes.