

Sheep Breeds



Photo: Cheviot Sheep Society

Cheviot

Origin: The breed originated in Scotland in the 1400s and was imported to the U.S. in 1838.

Physical characteristics: Small in size, white wool on the body with white hair on head, ears and legs.

Attributes: Extreme hardiness, longevity, meat production, mothering ability.

Source: American Cheviot Sheep Society, Wamego, Kansas

Columbia

Origin: Developed in Wyoming in 1912 from a cross of Lincoln and Rambouillet.

Physical characteristics: Large framed, polled, white wool with white hair on ears and face, some black pigment on nose and eyes is allowed.

Attributes: Wool production, classified as a medium wool with a micron size ranging from 30 to 24 microns.

Source: Columbia Sheep Breeders Association of America, Upper Sandusky, Ohio



Photo: Columbia Sheep Breeders Association



Photo: American Corriedale Association

Corriedale

Origin: Developed in New Zealand and Australia in the late 1800s from a cross of Lincoln or Leicester rams with Merino females. Imported to the U.S. in 1914.

Physical characteristics: Medium-sized white-faced wool breed.

Attributes: Produce a dense, uniform fleece and high-quality carcass, prolific, adaptable to different environments.

Source: American Corriedale Association, Wamego, Kansas

Dorper

Origin: Developed in South Africa in the 1930s as a cross between the Horned Dorset and Blackheaded Persian.

Physical characteristics: Hair sheep (no wool) with white bodies and either a white (white dorper) or black (black dorper) head.

Attributes: Long breeding season, rapid-growing lambs with high weaning weights, adaptable to a variety of climates, minimum labor required to maintain.

Source: American Dorper Sheep Breeders Society, Hallsville, Missouri



Photo: American Dorper Sheep Breeders Society



Photo: Silver Smith Genetics

Dorset

Origin: Originated from Southwestern England as a cross between the Merino and Horned sheep of Wales. Imported to the U.S. in 1860.

Physical characteristics: Medium-sized, all white wool free of dark pigmentation, good body length.

Attributes: Mothering ability, excellent carcass traits, and high-quality white fleece.

Source: Continental Dorset Club, North Scituate, Rhode Island

Hampshire

Origin: Developed in Hampshire County in southern England. Originally referred to as the “Hampshire Down” from the Southdown, Wiltshire Horn, and Berkshire Knot breeds of sheep. Imported to the U.S. in the 1800s.

Physical characteristics: White wool on body with dark-brown or black face and legs; face should be free of wool from the eyes down with an unbroken wool cap extending over the poll.

Attributes: Rapid growth, efficient feed conversion, used in market lamb production.

Source: American Hampshire Sheep Association, Wamego, Kansas



Photo: American Hampshire Sheep Association



Photo: Katahdin Hair Sheep International

Katahdin

Origin: Originated in Maine in 1958.

Physical characteristics: Hair sheep (no wool), medium-sized, un-docked tail (unless market lamb).

Attributes: Meat-type sheep, known for being tolerant to extreme climate and does not require shearing.

Source: Katahdin Hair Sheep International, Fowlerville, Michigan

Lincoln

Origin: Developed in Lincolnshire, England as a cross between Leicester and the Native Lincolnshire Sheep in the late 1700s.

Physical characteristics: The largest breed of sheep, fleece twisted into spiral locks, wool all the way down to the knee, broad head with wide-set, blue nostrils, face free of wool.

Attributes: Large, lean carcass, long fleece.

Source: National Lincoln Sheep Breeders Association, Wamego, Kansas



Photo: National Lincoln Sheep Breeders Association



Photo: Susan Schoenian, University of Maryland

Merino

Origin: Medium-wool merino bred in Australia.

Physical characteristics: Usually medium to large framed with exceptionally fine, white wool.

Attributes: Wool production.

Source: The Livestock Conservancy, Pittsboro, North Carolina

Oxford

Origin: Originated in Oxford County, England as a cross between the Hampshire and Cotswold breeds. Imported to the U.S. in the 1800s.

Physical characteristics: Medium to large-sized with white body wool free of dark fiber and a dark brown face and legs.

Attributes: Purebred breeding stock, market lamb production, terminal sires for meat.

Source: American Oxford Sheep Association, Inc., Marysville, Indiana



Photo: American Oxford Sheep Association



Photo: Benz Rambouillet

Rambouillet

Origin: Originated in France and Germany and developed from the Spanish Merino. Imported to the U.S. in the 1800s.

Physical characteristics: Large framed, face free from wool around and under the eye, medium-length ears.

Attributes: Superior, long staple, dense wool; hardy and adaptable breed for a variety of environments (dual-purpose).

Source: American Rambouillet Sheep Breeders Association, Wamego, Kansas

Shropshire

Origin: Developed in the Shropshire and Staffordshire counties in England from the Longmynd, Southdown, Leicester, and Cotswold breeds of sheep. Imported to the U.S. in 1855.

Physical characteristics: Medium to large, black-faced breed with medium wool; clean head with dark face, no horns, no black fibers on the body.

Attributes: Feed efficiency, prolific mothers, easy lambers, meat production, great youth projects.

Source: American Shropshire Registry Association, Leyden, Massachusetts



Photo: VIP Club Lambs



Photo: American Southdown Breeders' Association

Southdown

Origin: Developed in Sussex England in the late 1700s and imported to the U.S. in 1824.

Physical characteristics: Medium to small-sized breed with gray to mouse-brown nose and lower legs.

Attributes: Economical to feed and maintain, meat production, ideal for a small acreage.

Source: American Southdown Breeders' Association, Fredonia, Texas

Suffolk

Origin: Developed on the Southeastern coast of England from breeding Southdown rams to Norfolk Horned ewes. Imported to the U.S. in 1888.

Physical characteristics: Extremely muscular, large framed sheep with a black face and legs.

Attributes: Rapid growth and meat production.

Source: United Suffolk Sheep Association, Holland, Iowa



Photo: United Suffolk Sheep Association



Photo: American Polypay Association

Polypay

Origin: Developed with the goal of increasing prolificacy. Created from a cross of Finnsheep, Rambouillet, Targhee, and Dorsets in the 1960s. Named Polypay, which comes from “poly” meaning many and “pay” for return on investment

Physical characteristics: Moderately sized, free of neck folds, all-white wool with no more than 10% colored hair on face or legs.

Attributes: High prolificacy, large lamb crops, rapid growth rate, good carcass quality.

Source: American Polypay Sheep Association, Wamego, Kansas

Texel

Origin: Isle of Texel off the coast of the Netherlands.

Physical characteristics: White-faced breed with no wool on its head or legs. Short, wide face with a black nose and widely placed, short ears.

Attributes: Superior muscling, leanness and feed efficiency.

Source: Texel Sheep Breeders Society, Waterford, Ohio



Photo: Texel Sheep Society

Payton Dahmer

Graduate Teaching Assistant

Alison Crane, Ph.D.

Sheep and Meat Goat Specialist

Department of Animal Sciences and Industry

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