



## Hair Sheep: No Wooling Around

**Ideally suited for small-farm production, easy-care hair-sheep breeds have come a long way from their beginnings 10,000 years ago.**

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Courtesy American Dorper Sheep Breeders Society, Inc.

The White Dorper sheep is a sturdy, all-white breed. Dorper sheep are one of the fastest growing sheep breeds in America

### St. Croix and St. Thomas Sheep

St. Croix sheep are a polled, pure-white, true hair-sheep breed originating on the Caribbean island of St. Croix, where they were possibly developed through crossing West African hair sheep with British Wiltshire Horns. In the 1960s, Michael Piel of Maine imported "African Hair Sheep" (St. Croix) to use in developing Katahdin sheep. In 1975, Dr. Warren Foote of Utah State University imported three rams and 22 bred ewes; this importation provided the foundation for today's St. Croix breed.

They are medium-sized animals, with ewes weighing about 150 pounds and rams in the 200-pound range. These sheep show marked parasite resistance and thrive in hot, humid conditions, though they adapt to northern climates, as well. They are noted for productivity and are less reactive than some other hair-sheep breeds.

St. Croix sheep are listed as Threatened on the ALBC Conservation Priority List. The breed is also called the Virgin Island White. St. Thomas sheep are colored sheep of the same breed.

### Mouflon, Corsican, Texas Dall, Black Hawaiian, Desert Sand and Painted Desert Sheep

These are strongly horned trophy, meat and ornamental hair-sheep breeds registered by the United Horned Hair Sheep Association. They were created by blending European Mouflon, Barbados Blackbelly and wool-breed genetics and differ mainly in coloration.

Mouflons are regal and deer-like in looks and nature. They descend all or in part from European Mouflons and have striped faces, white tail patches and underbellies, and body coats ranging in color from fawn to mahogany. Rams develop long, dark manes and white saddle patches on their sides in winter. Their tails are 4 inches or less in length; this is a requirement for registration. Another distinguishing feature is the Mouflon ram's enormous, heart-shaped, arching horns. Mouflons are smaller than the other breeds this organization recognizes: Rams stand 27 to 35 inches tall and weigh 90 to 120 pounds. Ewes can be polled or horned and are smaller than rams, up to 30 inches tall and weighing around 77 pounds.

Corsicans have solid-colored or badger-striped faces and come in shades of fawn to mahogany in a variety of patterns, including blackbelly, lightbelly, mouflon and solids. Like the other breeds registered by this organization, Corsican rams have manes they may or may not shed during the summer months, and two to four large, strong horns. Ewes of these breeds may be horned or polled and weigh from 60 to 150 pounds; rams are heavier at 75 to 200 pounds.

Texas Dalls are slim, athletic sheep with snowy-white coats and white hooves and horns. Black Hawaiians may appear to be their opposite: coal black with black hooves and horns. Both breeds weigh in at an average of 70 to 100 pounds for ewes and 100 pounds for rams.

Courtesy Rafter SB, Ohio

The spotted Painted Desert sheep was created by mixing European Mouflon, Barbados Blackbelly and wool-breed genetics.

Desert Sand sheep range in hue from light champagne to light copper, some with lighter-colored faces, legs and bellies; hooves and horns are cream or light brown. They are sometimes called Red Dalls or Champagne Dalls. Ewes are an average of 70 to 100 pounds, and rams average 100 pounds.

Painted Deserts are beautifully spotted sheep in two or three and sometimes four to six distinct colors, one of which must always be white. Horns and hooves can be white, black or striped. Ewes have an average weight of 65 to 85 pounds, and rams have an average weight of 75 to 100 pounds. These beautiful sheep are also registered by the Painted Desert



Sheep Society.

#### Katahdin Sheep

In 1957, noted sheepman Michael Piel of Maine imported a group of “African Hair Sheep” from St. Croix to his farm in north-central Maine. With them, he hoped to develop a hardy, productive, wool-less breed of sheep, and at this, he was uncommonly successful. He crossed his original imports with each other and an array of wool breeds, including Tunis, Southdowns, Hampshires and Suffolks, later adding Wiltshire Horn hair sheep and additional wool-breed genetics, then selecting for hair coat, meat-type conformation, high fertility and flocking instinct. In the early 1970s, when he felt he’d come close to achieving his goal, he selected 120 ewes from his large flock and named them Katahdins after Mt. Katahdin, the highest mountain peak in Maine.

The Katahdin sheep is listed as a Recovering heritage breed on the ALBC Conservation Priority List. Katahdins are docile, medium-sized sheep; ewes weigh 125 to 185 pounds, rams 180 to 250 pounds. They are shedders; in cold weather, Katahdins grow a thick winter coat that sheds spontaneously in late spring. They can be any solid color or color combination.

#### Dorper Sheep

Beginning in the 1930s, a group of South African sheepmen set out to create a breed of easy-care, shedding sheep capable of thriving in South Africa’s harsh, arid climate while still producing fine-grained, succulent meat. Parent breeds included ultra-hardy, fat-tailed Blackhead Persian hair sheep and wool-bearing British Dorset Horns. They completed their work in 1946 and established the South African Dorper Breeders’ Association in 1950. Today, the Dorper is one of America’s fastest-growing breeds and, numerically, the second largest breed in South Africa, with large populations in South America, the British Isles, Australia and New Zealand, as well.

Dorpers are registered in two separate herd books as White Dorpers (all-white) or as Dorpers (white sheep with coal-black heads). They are long, strong, square-built sheep. Mature rams weigh in the neighborhood of 230 pounds, while ewes range from 180 to 210 pounds. Dorpers are docile and adapt well to a wide range of climates; they are also widely used in crossbreeding programs with the other hair sheep breeds to boost the growth rate and carcass quality of market lambs. Twinning is common for Dorper sheep.

#### Wiltshire Horn Sheep

Wiltshire Horns are an ancient British shedding breed developed on the chalk-based downs of Wiltshire. By the beginning of the 19th century, there were 700,000 Wiltshire Horns in Wiltshire County alone. Like many heritage breeds, the Wiltshire Horn eventually fell out of favor and was all but extinct 100 years ago. Today, it’s listed as a Recovering breed on the ALBC Conservation Priority List. (The ALBC also maintains a North American registry for Wiltshire Horns.) Due to its rich background, Wiltshire Horns are among the rare breeds raised at Plimouth Plantation in Plymouth, Mass.

Both sexes are strongly horned. Wiltshire Horns are calm, meaty, white sheep that grow a coarse, self-shedding, woolly winter coat; rams sometimes grow a cape of longer fiber on their chests. They are productive (twins are common) and noted for their ease of lambing. Rams can weigh more than 270 pounds and ewes more than 150 pounds.

If you’re thinking of raising sheep, hair sheep are the productive, easy-care sheep for today’s small farm. With so many breeds available, there’s bound to be one—or more—that will fit your small-farm situation.

About the Author: Sue Weaver and her husband live on a ridge-top farm in the Arkansas Ozarks where they keep livestock, including sheep—among them an extra-special Dorper-Katahdin lamb named Mopple.

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