

Sheep Ambassadors

Leicester Longwools can ‘sell themselves’ once people see them; I’ve certainly witnessed this phenomenon many times over when I introduce my own sheep to visitors here at our farm. The real challenge in conservation of a rare breed like the Leicester Longwool is exposing them to as many people as we can. As shepherds we are all busy enough tending our farms and flocks, so hosting farm visits, and adding education and promotion to our schedules is a real challenge. We can take a cue from the Colonial Williamsburg model by reaching out to other living history museums and offering to place Leicester Longwools in their farmstead programs. In this setting the sheep themselves can be their own ambassadors.

Here in Midland County, MI, we have a wonderful living history museum incorporated into the Chippewa Nature Center. Many years ago (pre-farm!) my husband and I used to volunteer during the fall harvest weekend (he would do rope making and I would spin wool). There were always a few Suffolk sheep at the homestead farm, on loan from a local farm. Our daughters have attended summer programs and both of them are now CITs (counselors in training) for the children’s summer day programs.

The winter after I got our Leicester Longwools, I had a visitor to my farm store who coincidentally works at the Chippewa Nature Center. She had come out to my farm to purchase dried lavender. We started talking about yarn and wool and this led to a discussion of sheep. I told her about the Leicester Longwools and I mentioned to her that I thought they would be a great fit for the homestead farm at the nature center. When she got back to work that day she mentioned my offer to Kyle Bagnall, Manager of Historical Programs. Because of the significance of the history of the Leicester Longwools to Colonial America, Kyle did some research before he contacted me. I think he was as surprised as I was, to find out that Leicester Longwool sheep had a historical connection to Midland County dating back to the 1800s.

Kyle forwarded to me some information he found on the internet, through ProQuest Historical Newspapers (www.proquest.com). He started his search with archived local



George and Oliver settle into their summer residence at the Chippewa Nature Center

newspapers. From the *Midland Sun*, dated August 31, 1882 there was a reference to the Midland County Agricultural Society’s annual fall fair. There were listed four divisions of Leicesters entered that season. There was another similar listing dated October 8, 1885.

The *Midland Republican* listed “Premiums Awarded” at the Midland County Fair, 1899 and there was a reference to R. Ashby who won 1st place for a Leicester lamb. The name “Ashby” intrigued Kyle because a road that borders the Chippewa Nature Center is Ashby Road. After looking into it further, Kyle found that Ashby Road was indeed named after Richard Ashby, a native of England who immigrated to Midland, Michigan in 1868. His farm was 45 acres in size in 1884. It was very exciting for me to find out that there were Leicester Longwools in Midland County over 130 years ago.

My favorite clipping, also from the *Midland Republican*, is dated Feb. 11, 1898. It reads:

“A two-year-old Leicester ewe raised by Wm. Johnson of Ingersoll Township weighed 250 lbs. and dressed 151 lbs. Midland County is good for the biggest and best of about everything.”

Kyle continued to dig deeper and he expanded his search to include *The Democratic Free Press*, *The Detroit Free Press*, *The Michigan Farmer* and *Western Agriculturalist*. The oldest reference he shared with me was dated May 24, 1837 from the classified ads in the *Democratic Free Press*. The ad stated:

“TO FARMERS AND BREEDERS OF STOCK. – In consequence of the Subscriber declining business he offer for sale the whole of his valuable stock ... A large flock of sheep, many of which are half-blooded New Leicester; several full blooded New Leicester Rams of the pure blood, which sheared last year upwards of thirteen pounds of wool each – these animals were also imported last year...The whole of this stock has been selected with the greatest care, and by one of the greatest breeders in England.

– George Hentig, Grosse Isle, Monguagon, May 15, 1837.”

I invited Kyle to come to our farm to meet my Leicesters in person. We agreed that sending sheep out to the Chippewa Nature Center that spring would be a wonderful way to showcase Leicester Longwool sheep and to provide a historically significant breed for the homestead farm.

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Laurie Ball-Gisch, The Lavender Fleece

Message from the president

All the best to all the Leicester Breeders. I started this letter as I was vacationing on the Isle of Jersey – A lovely group of islands (Jersey, Guernsey, Sark, Herme and Alderney) off the coast of France but they are English thanks to William the Conqueror. This is where the Jersey cow comes from.

Seeing this island has been on my bucket list for many years since I read a book by Gerald Durrell called *My family and other animals*. Mr. Durrell was one of the first zookeepers to be concerned about the loss of wild animals species in the wild and he set up a zoo on Jersey to breed endangered animals and eventually return them to the wild. He wrote numerous books about his experiences and all the ones I have read are great. I stayed at the zoo in a great hostel with two friends and several people from around the world who were at the zoo for conservation training. For atmosphere the lemurs yell at each other at odd hours of the day and night (for small animals they are amazingly loud). We had great breakfasts with lots of fruit, which was the same fruit fed to the gorillas!

Then I was off to visit Polly Jones in Wales and she is a great tour guide! We went to two weaving operations

which had woven things for Polly. Both operations used looms from the turn of the century to make carpet and heavy blankets. It was fascinating to watch these machines work. We also went to the Wool Museum of Wales which was excellent and had an operating spinning jenny which spun 400 threads at a time. Unbelievable to see in operation. We stopped to see Jenny Thompson, a Leicester breeder in Gloucester and see her sheep. She had some interesting crossbreeds and some very nice purebreds.

After Polly's I got the chance to catch up with Libby Henson. Libby has agreed to be our UK representative to work on the exchange of genetic material between the UK and the US. She has worked with rare livestock for many years and was the only employee of the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy in it's infancy. She got the ALBC up and running and now runs a business writing software for purebred pedigrees. Her family started the Cotswold Farm Park which is a terrific rare breed park in one of the prettiest spots in England. It was great to get back to England and Wales.

I hope many of you are coming to the conference. We are having two return speakers, both of whom have a

wealth of knowledge we can gain from. Dr. Phil Sponenberg will talk to us about pedigrees, genetics and why we are working with these sheep and their place in the world population. We have some interesting topics to discuss. Bring your questions, Phil is very good at explaining the genetics in terms that are understandable and make sense!

Dr. Ann Zajack will also return due to popular demand! She will talk to us about parasites and what to do about them. Everyone who heard her talk last year felt it was very beneficial and we all learned a lot about these tough creatures. The conference schedule is Friday evening at the Fife and Drum building for food and a chance to mingle. Bring your items made from your sheep and pictures of farm and flock for a show and tell. Saturday morning at Bruton Heights for Phil's talk, lunch on your own, look over sheep in the afternoon at the stables and using the breed standard. Saturday evening dinner at the Whaling Company. Sunday morning at Bruton Heights for Ann's talk. Plan to attend the conference and meet your fellow breeders. Come armed with pedigree and parasite questions.

– Elaine Shirley

Colonial Williamsburg Rare Breeds Program

Fall Conference Colonial Williamsburg

Nov. 2, 3 and 4, 2012

special guest speakers

Dr. Phil Sponenberg
*a pathologist and geneticist
from Virginia Tech*

Dr. Ann Zajack
*a parasitologist
from Virginia Tech*



Note from your Registrar

Kelly Smith, Hoppin Acres Farm

You must be a member of the LLSBA and assigned a Breeders Code to Register and Transfer sheep within the Association. Membership dues are \$25 per year. Your dues must be current in order to Register and Transfer animals. (2013 Dues are due January 31, 2013.) If you failed to pay your 2012 dues and have prior year registrations, your dues will need to be paid in full before registrations will be processed. If you have any questions please feel free to email Kelly at hoppingacres@frontiernet.

Registration Fees; Ewes under 1 year \$5.00, Ewes over 1 year \$10.00, Rams \$10.00

Registration and Transfer Forms are available on the LLSBA Website.

You must note on your registration if the animal is white or colored. Colored animals are assigned a C after their registration number.

Please make checks made payable to LLSBA. Send Registration and Transfer Forms to: Kelly Smith-Anderson LLSBA Registrar, 3458 Sugar Valley Rd., Bruceton Mills, WV 26525

It is so important for all animals, of breed standard quality, to be registered and transferred within the association. Our goal is to preserve a rare breed to the best of our abilities by breeding top quality breeding stock to pass on to the next generation.

2007 Rams Registered 38; **Ewes** Registered 86

2008 Rams Registered 37; **Ewes** Registered 108

2009 Rams Registered 40; **Ewes** Registered 112

2010 Rams Registered White 42; Colored 8; **Ewes** Registered White 112, Colored 15

2011 Rams Registered White 35; Colored 13; **Ewes** Registered White 126, Colored 21

Minutes of the Annual Meeting, LLSBA, May 2012 submitted by Joan Henry, secretary

The meeting of the Leicester Longwool Sheep Breeders Association was held May 4, 2012 at the Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival. 27 members and 5 Board of Directors attended the meeting.

Elaine Shirley, president called the meeting to order.

Minutes of last years meeting were read by Secretary, Joan Henry. Minutes were approved. The Treasurers Report was also read and approved.

Old Business

Elaine spoke about the newsletter and encouraged all members to submit articles about themselves, their sheep and farms and activities they are doing to promote the Leicester Longwools.

Elaine also talked about last years Fall conference and the speakers who attended and what they talked about.

Kelly Smith Anderson, Registrar, gave a report on the number of registered animals:

- 2007 38 rams and 86 ewes
- 2008 37 rams and 108 ewes
- 2009 40 rams and 112 ewes
- 2010 8 colored rams and 42 white rams
15 colored ewes and 112 white ewes
- 2011..... 11 colored rams and 33 white rams
17 colored ewes and 95 white ewes

All members were encouraged to send in any registrations for these years if they haven't done so.

Discussion was held on knowing your bloodlines and how to breed.

The new LLSBA display was available for all to see and all members were told it would be available for their use. The LLSBA would pay for the cost of shipping it to any member but the member would be responsible for sending it back and paying for the postage.

Brochures are available from any BOD member but members were encouraged to be selective on giving them out, due to the cost of having them printed.

Kelly Smith Anderson told all members that she would have T-shirts, mugs, pens, etc from the LLSBA for sale in her booth.

New Business

Elaine talked about our status with applying for our Non Profit application. All paperwork was submitted for it and we are waiting for approval.

The new Board of Directors were presented:

- Elaine Shirley, President
- Kelly Smith Anderson, Vice President/ Registrar
- Joan Henry, Secretary/Treasurer
- Rebecca Pushkin, Amy Manko, Flock Representatives.

Elaine encouraged all members to contact any of the BOD for help with anything.

The dates for the Fall Conference at Colonial Williamsburg were announced: November 2 - 4, 2012. Elaine will send out more information about the conference to all members.

Elaine read a letter that was sent to Carol McConaughy about a forage based ram performance test at Virginia Tech's Southwest Ag Research and Extension Center in Glade Spring Virginia. The contact information was given if any member was interested in participating.

Kelly also spoke about the Ram performance testing that is held in Petersburg, WV each year.

Elaine spoke about sending a letter to all members who have not registered sheep for several years to find out the status about their flocks.

Any member who sells sheep to a first time buyer of LL's will get a reduction of the cost of providing a membership to the new owners. This cost will only be \$10.00.

Elaine also encouraged members to spread the word to other members who are looking to sell their flocks so we can help place the sheep, rather than take them to the auction. You can contact any BOD member for help with this.

Elaine also talked about the Swiss Valley Foundation (SVF) It is an organization that collects genetic material from rare breeds and keeps it in long term storage for future use. If anyone is interested in participating with this project, please contact them at <http://svffoundation.org>.

Treasurers Report

May 4, 2012

submitted by Joan Henry, treasurer

Beginning Balance (May 2011)

\$ 2720.92

Outgoing Expenses

Printing of brochures	308.14
Web Hosting	48.00
Sympathy Arrangements	198.74
Postage	308.75
Advertising	150.00
Office Supplies	366.38
Display	546.07
Inc Fee	25.00
Shirts	313.76
	678.40
Newsletter	285.03
Dinners (fall conference)	85.89
Total Expenses	\$ 3307.86

Incoming

Dues	1150.00
Registrations/Transfers	1890.00
Sales	856.21
Total Incoming	3596.21

Ending Balance May 4, 2012

\$ 3009.27

A discussion was held about having another card grading show at the Michigan Fiber Festival in 2013. If there was enough members interested in participating, then we would proceed with organizing it with the Festival Committee. **But due to lack of membership interest, there will not be a card grading show in Michigan in 2013**

Emphasis will be put on how to prepare your sheep for a card grading event at the Fall Conference this year.

Elaine encouraged all members to get together and help each other on all aspects of sheep.

With no further questions or discussions, the meeting was adjourned.

Log on and stay in touch! Check out the LLSBA on FaceBook and Yahoo online:



USA Leicester Longwools Association, www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_239467173365

YAHOO! <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Leicesterlongwool/>

Exhibiting Heritage Breeds *Richard Larson, Old Gjerpen Farm*

Having raised heritage breeds for 20 years, we at Old Gjerpen Farm have come to recognize that exhibiting your livestock is an essential part of rare breeds' conservation.

Growing up in rural Wisconsin the county fair was a community event with a long and deep agrarian history. The fair was in late summer – before school began and before fall harvest season. It was where siblings competed with siblings, friends with friends and neighbors with neighbors. The fair was an annual rite where an independent arbitrator – the judge – decided who had done the best job of breeding, growing and exhibiting their livestock. It was a time that a young boy looked forward to with much anticipation. It was with that rich history that we took our first Karakul ram to the Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival (MS&WF) in 1995. Over the intervening years we have organized and hosted national and regional breed shows; initiated local heritage breeds exhibitions in collaboration with the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy; and, participated in Leicester Longwool card-grading exhibitions.

Based on our experience, we believe there are three reasons why exhibiting is important to breed conservation.

- Festivals/shows/exhibitions are a place to educate the public about heritage breeds.
- They provide an excellent opportunity to market your products.
- They are a venue for receiving external, independent and critical evaluation of your effort.

Educating the Public

Festivals, shows and exhibitions are one of the few places for the general public to come in contact with heritage breeds. At a time when many people grow up believing that milk comes from a plastic container in a store, it is important for them to have an opportunity to see and touch a long wool, a fine wool, etc., and associate that animal / breed with the sweater, socks, or felted jacket they may be wearing.

Festivals are also a place and time when people who are thinking about raising sheep can see, touch and learn about the rich heritage of many valued breeds better enabling them to make informed decisions about which breed they want to raise and why.

For both the general public and want-to-be shepherds festivals are a place that provides an informal opportunity to share the



Richard with a 2012 Champion Lamb at the Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival

importance of conserving genetic diversity in our national livestock and why breed conservation is so important to the future of agriculture in our country.

Sheep Ambassadors

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In April, just after shearing, we delivered two adult rams: “George” a white ram that I purchased from Colonial Williamsburg and “Oliver,” a colored ram.

I wanted visitors to be able to see that the breed could be both white and colored. I decided against sending ewes or lambs because I wanted the staff there not to have to worry about tending to the needs of younger sheep. Ron Burk (staff member) and Philip Meister (volunteer) were in charge of the feeding and watering of the rams. They provided free choice hay and whole corn (spoiling them to be sure) as well as fresh water; I took out their minerals to be left in a free choice container inside one of their shelters. The rams had two large paddocks and two shelters to choose from. We only received two calls over the summer. Once, when Ron noticed some blood on George’s head (he had bumped a scur, probably tussling with Oliver over corn). Another day he called because George was limping (he needed a hoof trimming). We went out both times and checked the rams out for Ron. We also took care of worming the rams. It was a great

and easy partnership. We really appreciate the excellent care the rams received. We will bring the rams home in November when the farmstead closes for the season. We will be happy to repeat the partnership in 2013 and Kyle assures me that George and Oliver already have an invitation to summer at the Chippewa Nature Center again next yet.

To further educate the visiting public, I also donated Leicester wool so that the Sunday volunteer spinners could work with Leicester fleece when they demonstrated spinning.

I asked Kyle if he would summarize the program for me and this is what he shared:

“Since 1989, Chippewa Nature Center’s 1870 Homestead Farm has been open for visitors of all ages to learn about life on a farm more than a century ago. Our grounds are open year-round from dawn to dusk and special programs occur on Sunday afternoons in the summer season. This year, more than 1,500 visitors attended Homestead Sunday programs from Memorial Day through Labor Day. In all, more than 50,000 people visit the Nature Center throughout the year.

The favorite part of any visit to the Homestead is a chance to see the farm animals. Cattle, chickens, pigs and sheep currently reside at the Homestead from spring

through fall, most loaned by local farmers. Livestock allow us to teach visitors the many ways in which animals are used on the farm and the importance of preserving rare breeds. George and Oliver, our new Leicester Longwools, were a definite highlight for visitors this season. We shared information about these special sheep and volunteers Sue Erhardt and Andrea Foster demonstrated carding and spinning Leicester wool and knitting a hat and mittens. In addition, an image of George was used for program advertising. Visitors love the Leicester Longwools.”

There are living history museums located around the country and many of them have a sheep/wool component. The Association for Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums (ALHFAM) lists living history museums state by state. On their website they explain part of their mission as: “... the effort to bring history to life ... in living animals and plants, in staff performing historic work or trades, and in the effort made to provide an environment rich in artifacts that focus attention on life in past times.”

I would encourage those interested in a farm/history partnership to visit the website at www.alhfam.org

Marketing Your Products

Ongoing active participation in the conservation of heritage breeds ultimately requires that you are able to sell your “product” – fleece, meat and breeding stock. With very little extra effort, festivals provide a wide range of marketing opportunities. We rarely “sell” a sheep at a festival. The more common scenario is that future sales, two or three years later, result from that initial encounter during an exhibition. It is not uncommon for us to receive an email that starts with, “You may not remember me but we talked at ... several years ago and I am now ready to purchase my starter flock.”

Festivals are a great place to sell fleece. Every year we take seven (festival limit) fleeces to the MS&WF for show and sale. What an easy way to sell fleeces for \$10 to \$12 per pound. All you have to do is enter the fleeces and come back at the end of the festival to collect your show premiums and sales revenue. And, if your fleeces are really good you can expect future sales from very satisfied customers.

In the 2012 MS&WF fleece show we were pleased that OGF Eleanor’s fleece was selected as the Champion Leicester Longwool fleece and OGF Lady Grey’s fleece was the Champion Natural Colored fleece.

External, Independent & Critical Evaluation

Raising livestock, particularly heritage breeds, requires that you regularly make decisions that will ultimately determine your future success or failure as a breeder. Decisions such as pairing rams with ewes, what to feed your sheep, which offspring to keep, etc., are critical to your long term success as a rare breeds conservationist. Whether you invest a little or a lot of time and thought making these decisions, I suspect most shepherds believe that their sheep are the best and reflect well on the breed.

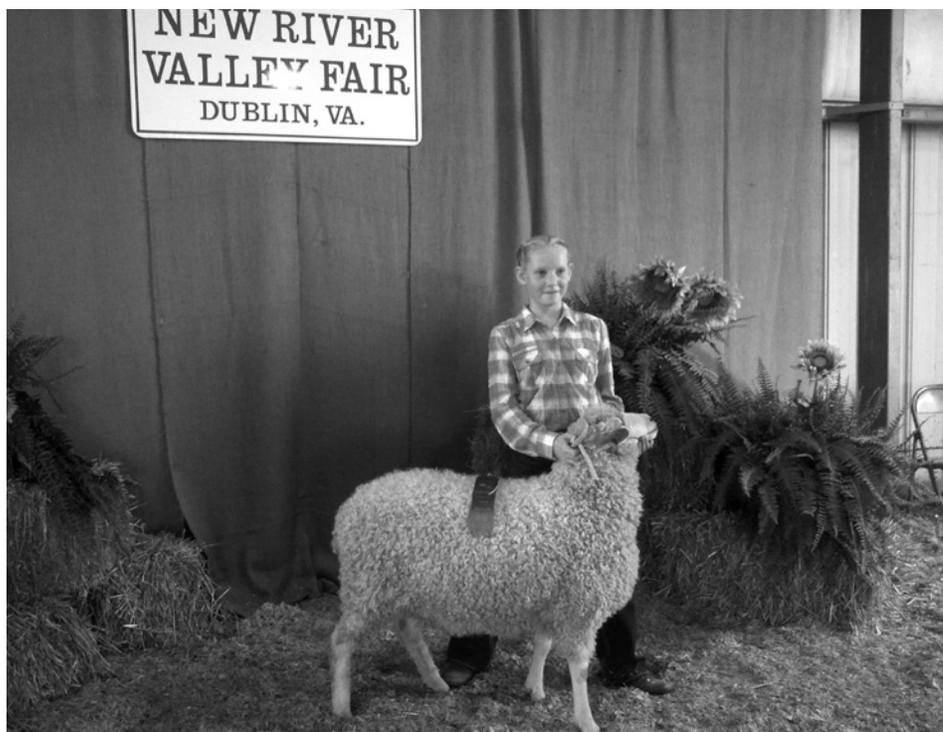
Festivals provide an opportunity for independent evaluation by an impartial and knowledgeable person – the judge(s). Showing your sheep should be an educational experience for you. No matter where your sheep places in a class or what color card it received, the judge’s comments about the strengths and weaknesses of the sheep frequently are very instructive. For example at the New York card-grading exhibition the judge spent about five minutes critiquing each animal and longer if questions were asked. It is important to keep in mind that one judge on one day is one opinion. However over time (years) if you hear similar critiques about your sheep, whether good or bad, the validity and thus value to you of the comments increases.

At the 2012 MS&WF sheep show OGF Sir George was awarded the Best Fleece in Show for the white longwool division. This was the seventh consecutive year that an OGF sheep received the white longwool Best Fleece in Show award.

Looking Forward

We were pleased to hear that the Association may be organizing a Card-Grading Exhibition for 2013 at the Michigan Fiber Festival. The two previous card-grading events were held in Maryland and New York. Fourteen flocks exhibited 45 head at the 2009 New York Exhibition. Holding the next LL event in the Midwest will enable breeders who were not able to travel to either of the earlier exhibitions to participate, as well as many of the newer breeders. I must say that while transporting sheep in the heat of the summer is not our idea of great fun, we are looking forward to participating not only for the reasons outline above but also for the people. Donna and I look forward to festivals as they are an opportunity to annually renew old friendships and meet wonderful new “sheep people” who are the nicest and most considerate people in the world. We strongly encourage all breeders to seriously consider participating in the Michigan exhibition and look forward to a great gathering.

The 2012 Leicester Longwool Youth Conservationist Winner



Katie West with her Leicester Longwool sheep Ella. Katie is 10 years old and is vice-president of her local 4-H club “Country Kids 4-H” in Riner, VA.

Katie West is the proud winner of the 2012 Leicester Longwool Youth Conservationist Program. Katie entered her essay on “Why would I like to help preserve a heritage breed of sheep?” – and she won!

The winner agrees to fulfill multiple requirements in the care of her Leicester Longwool sheep. She is required to use the fleece to make a wool item or to sell it to someone who will use it to make a wool item. She is required to exhibit the sheep in a county or state fair two times in 2012. And, she is required to breed the ewe only to another registered Leicester Longwool sheep.

The Youth Conservationist Program began in 1997 – founded by Donna and Richard Larson. The program is currently run by Elaine Ashcraft. For more information contact Elaine at tankewe@tusco.net or mail to 46118 CR 58, Coshocton, OH 43812.

The MS&WF selects over 15 youth annually to receive a registered rare breed ewe from donor breeders. The LLSBA is very proud to be a continuing sponsor of this fine program that encourages animal care and management in our youth.

Breeders get together ...

Leicester Longwool shepherds in the southwest region of Virginia met at the home of Gail and Harry Groot on September 8, 2012. The purpose of the meeting was for breeders in the area to get acquainted with one another and to discuss ways that we might work together to make the best use of the Leicester Longwool sheep in our region. Those in attendance were Gail and Harry Groot, Dr. Phil Sponenberg and his wife, Torsten, Paula Bittinger, Tammy Goodyear, Sara Criner and Brit Ritchey.

There were many conversations going at any one time, as tends to happen when shepherds are in the company of other shepherds who are willing to discuss all things sheep long after non-shepherds would have faked a medical emergency just to get away.

After a general discussion of the history of the breed, the group went out to critique the Groot's sheep. In the first group, there were several adult ewes and two ewe lambs to look at. We did a card grading type of exercise with a LOT of guidance from Phil. It was so helpful to be able to do this in such a small group, with such an esteemed expert present. Each animal was judged against the breed standard, and it became clear that most animals will have some wonderful attributes and some attributes that aren't so desirable. Being able to determine which traits are major flaws and which traits are correctable by breeding to the right ram is a skill that will take time to develop, but one that all LL breeders should be working toward. We were shown how to check that the teeth meet the dental pad, what a "too straight" leg looks like, how the back of the sheep should feel, especially over the shoulders, what 'britchy' wool looks like, and the differences in the fleeces were discussed at length.

We then moved to the ram pen and repeated the exercise. Those in our group had varying amounts of experience as shepherds. Again, it was so helpful to be in a small group and have time to ask questions and have them answered in depth.

After a short break for refreshments, we went inside to discuss breeding strategies. Phil explained how to decipher some of the pedigrees and which lines were from the UK, Tasmania, Australia and New Zealand. Because we are dealing with such small flocks and so few animals from each line, we can't make the same decisions that breeders with huge flocks can make. For example, if you have twenty rams of the same bloodline, keep the best two or three to use for breeding. If you have just one ram of a critical bloodline, but he's a lesser quality ram, still use him as a stair step to get to where you want to get. Determining which animals are acceptable to use for breeding will take experience. This is where our group can possibly work with one another by sharing rams. Theoretically this will help to keep inferior animals out of the breeding pool but still allow all the breeders to breed their ewes.

As it became apparent that we were going to run out of time long before we ran out of material to discuss, Phil listed some of the priorities that we as breeders need to be aware of, and select for:

1. The animals should be easy keepers. Leicester Longwools should be hardy animals that gain weight readily on pasture.
2. Keep the large size. The rams should easily weigh 200 pounds and the ewes 150 lbs. or better. Over time the breed has become smaller but the large size should not be lost.

Brit Ritchey, Buckeye View Farm

3. Evaluate the wool: weigh the fleeces. Don't let it get too fine. Keep a record of each fleece from year to year. Save a lock from the same spot each year, label it with the sheep's ID and the date. Compare the locks each year so that you can identify trends, either positive or negative.

4. It is important to label/ID your sheep so IF YOU DIE, someone can match the sheep with a pedigree so the genetics aren't lost. This is crucial. Divorce, natural disasters, death and other events can happen suddenly. Without proper planning ahead of time, it may not be possible for the sheep to be properly identified.

5. Shear your lambs when they have one inch of fleece! In Dr. Sponenberg's experience, the lambs will grow better and the curly lamb tip is cut off. The resulting fleece, when it's sheared, will be of better quality.

6. Deworming by FAMACHA is essential. Keep records and watch for trends. It will help you to make better decisions about which animals should be in the breeding program, and in the long run, it will be beneficial for the breed.

Finally, Torsten Sponenberg, who has lots of experience in this department, gave us a tutorial on washing wool at home. She brought her props and walked us through all the steps to get the wool clean while preserving the lock structure. It was most informative and enjoyable.

Our meeting was a great success and we agreed that we'd like to meet again, perhaps quarterly. Items to discuss in the future may include marketing strategies and how we can work together to showcase these sheep and their wool in our area.

Leicester Longwool Ladies

Ann Vonnegut and Melanie Rowan have joined together for three years and running to vend Leicester Longwool products at local fiber fairs. Ann and Melanie have set up at the Shenandoah Valley Fiber Festival in Berryville, VA and the Fall Fiber Show and Sheep Dog Trials at Montpelier, Orange, VA and are looking to add a show or two in 2013.

It's easy to come up with a catchy name and join together to promote the Leicester Longwools and their wonderful by-products. Available for sale are rugs, throws, felted animals, soap, roving, note cards, pelts and yarn. Ann and Melanie have a busy fall getting ready for the shows, keeping up with the farm as well as making products to sell.

The shows attract fiber buyers from a large area, including Northern Virginia and Richmond. It is really a nice feeling when someone comes by and says "Oh, you're the Leicester Longwool Ladies, we were hoping you would be here!" It's great fun to talk about our sheep with other shepherds and our fibers with those who appreciate a home-grown product. It is also a nice time to tell a little about the history of the rare breed and it's reintroduction to the U.S. through Colonial Williamsburg.

People are coming to know about our sheep and our fibers more and more.

Melanie Rowan, Row House Farm



The Leicester Longwool Ladies tent

Shearing Without Breaking A Sweat

Richard Larson, Old Gjerpen Farm

Looking out my window, as I am writing this article, I see over three feet of snow, more snow than we have had in northern Virginia in the past six years combined. Evening temperatures are in the teens and single digits. Now I know what you shepherds in Syracuse, Green Bay, and Fargo are saying – no big deal. Well maybe, but then we just sheared our pregnant ewes and to them it is something they are baaing about. But the salient question is – why shear pregnant ewes in the middle of winter? They grow wool to keep them warm in weather like this – right?

We have always shorn our pregnant ewes between Christmas and New Years. We first started this practice when raising Karakuls and have continued it with our Leicester Longwool flock. Both breeds are “long wool” their fleeces growing approximately an inch a month. We shear our ewes again in May. Thus we end up with seven-inch winter fleeces that are excellent for spinners and weavers and a five-inch spring fleeces that are better suited for felting.

We have found that there are several advantages to shearing ewes close to lambing.

- The winter fleeces are perfectly clean, the ewes have been outside on pasture up to this point.
- Shorn ewes bring much less moisture into the barn during lambing virtually eliminating health issues.
- It is so much easier to monitor the ewe condition during their advancing pregnancy and then enabling lambs to begin nursing easier when the ewes are recently shorn.
- The ewes are more likely to stay close to the barn and lamb under a dry covered area when shorn.
- Shorn ewes take up less space than ewes in full fleece.
- Scheduling your shearer – no problem with her schedule in January



A barn full of freshly shorn sheep.

- A major collateral advantage is that we receive a significant number of inquiries for fleeces right after the holidays and are thus able to move product quickly.
- Finally, January shearing is a great excuse to have long-time friends come by to “help.” Boy that hot cider sure tastes good!

Shearing in mid-winter does require several management adaptations. We try to shear on a relatively warm day with a forecast for several non-windy days ahead. Our ewes are free to stay under an overhang bedded with

lots of clean straw bedding and a row of straw bales around the edges. The overhang is boarded on two sides (north & west) and has “weather block” (a fine woven mesh) on the other two (south & east) sides. This arrangement allows the sun to warm the area, keep most moisture out, and provides great protection from wind. Hay and water are available under the

overhang so the ewes don’t need to venture out until they are ready.

It is interesting to watch how quickly the ewes “fuzz out” after shearing. Within a week their bodies have adjusted and they are out and about the paddock and adjacent field.

Feeding is more critical following winter shearing. Our ewes are started on whole corn before we shear. Following shearing we increase their corn intake by half, providing a ready increase in energy for keeping them warm. If we experience an exceptionally cold snap we will carry warm water to the barn for several days to help them conserve body heat and also to ensure that they stay fully hydrated so late in pregnancy.

After 20 years of following this practice we have never had a shearing related health issue. Would we do this if we lived in a colder climate – absolutely!

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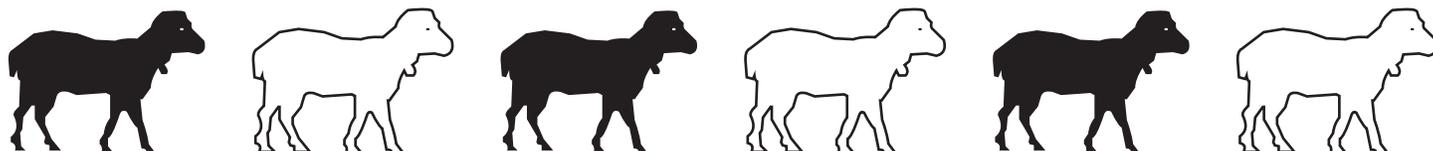
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Extra, Extra read all about it!

Calling for all LLSBA News! If you are an LLSBA Member and you have some interesting news, we would like to share it in our newsletter. We would be happy to have your article about your farm, your sheep and/or what you do with you sheep and their by-products. Please submit your articles and photos to Melanie Rowan, rowhousefarm@comcast.net. Your articles may be gently edited and your photos need to be high resolution digital images. Articles for the spring 2013 issue are due March. 15.





Paying lip service to the law

Ken Frizell, Nip & Tuck Farm

In all my years of driving, I had never been stopped by a policeman. Throughout my teens, my many commutes between home and college, job-related interstate moves, epic cross-country voyages behind the tiller of one Detroit land yacht or another, not one lawman had ever swung in behind me – lights flashing – and signaled for me to pull over.

But this day, it had finally happened. Even my ancient Ford pickup, once bright red, but now a rusting, faded, pinkish relic with a dented metallic-brown cap on top, seemed to blush in embarrassment. There I was, pulled off on the shoulder of the road, as a huge police officer, the palm of his right hand resting lightly on the handle of his holstered Glock, stared at me from behind his reflective sunglasses.

“Do you know why I stopped you?”

“Well, I ...”

“You’re all over the road!”

And the four sheep in back of my truck, who seconds before had been stampeding in circles around the enclosed bed, had suddenly grown silent. But I knew who was to blame. It was Casanova, the young ram and the three ewes I had purchased minutes earlier.

“Is it OK to haul a young ram with three ewes?” I had asked the farmer who sold them to me. It was an innocent question.

“Don’t worry,” he grinned. “The ram is still young. He isn’t interested in the ladies just yet.

Won’t be any trouble.”

“Casanova? Strange name for a prepubescent ram,” I thought.

Still, the first few miles had been uneventful – serene even – just a man, his truck and his sheep. And then, the amorous Casanova made his move. The ewes, apparently horrified at the ram’s unsavory intentions, bawled in terror and set off at breakneck speeds around the bed of the truck, causing it to rock violently. At one point it even tipped up on two wheels. I fought to regain control of the steering and to get all four tires back on the ground. And that was when the flashing lights appeared in my side mirror.

“How many people you got in the back?” It was not a question, but an accusation.

“Nobody. Just some sheep that I was ...”

“Please step out of your vehicle, sir,” he said coldly.

He marched me to the rear of the truck, ordered me to stand to one side, yanked open

the cap window and squinted inside. And there, inches from the cop’s nose, was Casanova, his upper lip curled and his eyes rolling madly.

That evening, as I eased the Ford into the barnyard to unload the sheep, I mused about the “official warning” I had received, the sting of it softened by the thought of the policeman, his shiny, if slightly bent, Ray-Bans hanging at an odd angle from one ear as he sat flat in the dirt and gravel, the soles of his boots pointed back to the spot where he had been standing before he had suddenly screamed, begun flailing his arms wildly and windmilled himself backwards until he tripped and sat down with a resounding THUD! For a terrifying few seconds, I imagined what the rest of my life would be like as a guest of the state and I hoped that the treacherous Casanova would be in the next cell.

But then the policeman smiled. And then he chuckled. And then he began to laugh uncontrollably. Tears rolled down his cheeks and he turned red as he tried to catch his breath. And then he started to laugh all over again.

Later, properly chastened and once again in my pickup, I blinked as the officer stuck his face in the truck window, smiled and said, “Don’t ever drive through my town again.”



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