

FINNSHEEP *short tales*

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Chief Shepherd's Message

Future of Finnsheep

Welcome to the new Millennium and I trust you all had happy and enjoyable holidays. As we move into a new era, the theme of this Short Tales is the 'Future of Finnsheep'. What we have endeavored to do is provide a short history of Finnsheep in the USA from the inception to present day and then outline the potential direction for this prolific breed of sheep.

Our editor has once again done a great job in researching and interviewing breeders for information and material for this newsletter. On behalf of all members I thank Grace for her time and efforts.

My messages over the last few issues have been factual and not always what breeders wanted to hear. However, this time I have some really good news. Elizabeth our Secretary advises me Finnsheep registrations for 1999 are more than double 1998 and many more than immediate preceding years. **The total registrations for 1999 at writing of this message is 361 compared to 180 in 1998.** If this trend is maintained perhaps we have turned the corner in preserving the Finnsheep as a viable and profitable sheep. A few new members have joined since I last put pen to paper and I welcome them to our Association.

Where should the Finnsheep Breeders' Association (FBA) go from here? Perhaps I can put this in some sort of context for you. In the macro sense the FBA is a seed stock producers organization principally providing a national recording system for pedigree Finnsheep and a focal point for Finnsheep breeders at large. Additionally, through our newsletter, published three times a year, our web-page: www.rockbridge.net/finnsheepusa/finnsheep8.htm and numerous press releases the FBA endeavors to provide, the membership, timely information on the sheep industry and what is happening with the breed. Furthermore the FBA is anxious to promote animal health and proliferation of the breed across America.

The purebred Finnsheep are noted for their prolific breeding, good milking and excellent mothering characteristics. These paramount traits are just beginning to

influence the global sheep industry. I was in New Zealand and Australia recently (home to 45 million and 117million sheep respectively) where the Finnsheep is being used in the cross breeding of traditional English breeds such as Romney, Dorset and the comparatively new Texel. One farm I visited of 3,200 head (all breeds) had sold over 1200 Finn/Romney rams. The aim of using the Finn in this cross is to raise the lambing percentage. The national lambing percentage in New Zealand is some 108% (in the US less than 100%). By increasing output a farmer can reduce the number of breeding ewes, a significant overhead in sheep farming, thus reducing production costs. Another farm I visited has a lambing percentage target of 200% (survival rate) using the Finnsheep across traditional breeds. I heard recently from the farm manager that they 'had a breakthrough and achieved 230% this season'. They do not want big litters but rather the consistent production and survival of twins, possibly triplets, by all ewes while reducing the number of 'dries' (unbred ewes). Similar use of the Finn is underway here on ranches in California and on sheep stations in Australia as articles further on will illustrate.

As for the beautiful soft lustre wool the Finnsheep produces, much work has been undertaken in Sweden on improving this quality. Over the last eighty years they have refined the fine wool characteristics (20 -22 micron) and now using them with the Merino. There is always a good market for consistent fine wool in Europe and elsewhere.

The Finnsheep can be an all round sheep if you look for the market. There are niche markets for the small carcass like the 'ethnic community' who relish very much the tender small Finnsheep. Likewise the home spinning market is always interested in Finnsheep wool. It depends on what market the individual breeder wishes to target:

- provide healthy prolific seed stock to the macro sheep industry to increase productivity while reducing overheads,
- seek the niche ethnic markets (of over 10 million) for small lambs,
- explore the local and international fine wool commercial market,
- pursue the local 'cottage wool industry ; or,
- any combination of the above.

It seems to me the way ahead for the FBA in the future is to develop a business plan with a robust marketing strategy for strong healthy Finnsheep. The strategy as I see it should be all encompassing and include such elements as: a recognized voluntary health protocol, a serious wool measurement guide, guidelines for breeders on entering and developing new markets, information on government initiatives regarding sheep and many more topics. Some work has started on this plan with the development of a Mission Statement (see separate article). Currently the FBA has limited resources to market Finnsheep but fosters collaborative activities among willing breeders, such as joint advertising. However, to expand beyond this requires resources i.e. money! I believe this is a

topic for the next Annual General Meeting (AGM) and would like to have your input to the discussion. While on the topic of meetings, in the last edition of this newsletter I indicated the next AGM would be held with the WI shepherd's symposium. The dates for the symposium do not work for the FBA and the Board has agreed to hold the next AGM in conjunction with the OH Sheep Day, Wooster, OH July 8, 2000. Please mark your calendars accordingly.

Before I conclude, I would like to remind all members annual fees are now due and those not paid before March 31, 2000 will not be getting another newsletter. With Spring not far away I hope your lambing is going well, you have a profitable year and shepherding brings much enjoyment to you all.

30 YEARS OF FINN CROSSES ON A WESTERN COMMERCIAL OPERATION

By Richard Hamilton, Hamilton Bros. Ranch, Rio Vista, CA

My family has been involved in CA agriculture (including sheep) for close to 150 years. I'm a fourth generation farmer/rancher. We grow wheat, barley, corn, sugar beets, alfalfa, tomatoes, pears, safflower; raise cattle and run around 4,000 whiteface commercial ewes (which are a 3/8Finn 3/8Targhee 1/4 Rambouillet cross) and we also have about 100 registered Suffolk ewes.

Most producers don't understand what the capabilities of the Finn sheep are. Most breeders won't believe you in terms of production. Plus, they also stereotype a Finn as not being a breed of sheep that is compatible in the Western sheep operation, which is wrong. The unique thing about the Finn is that you can incorporate the % of Finn sheep you need to work in your operation. If your production system doesn't work for twins maybe just adding 1/16 to 1/8 Finn could help cut down your open ewes and increase the mothering ability of your ewes.

The use of breeds like Finnsheep and combinations of breeds to make a better more productive sheep for a given area is one of the most underused tools in our industry. When my father started using Finns in 1970, we were having between 10 to 13% open ewes and not getting enough twins to cover that inefficiency. Even today California's lambing % is only around 90%. He came to the conclusion that the traditional range ewe in our area couldn't be productive enough to meet the ever changing demands of the sheep industry in our area. People criticized and made quick judgements on his use of the Finn, because they looked a little different, but again they really didn't understand what he was using the Finn for and how he was going to use a selection program to develop the traits that he felt were most desirable for our operation. Most producers don't understand or don't have the patience to appreciate the time it takes to make progress in a selection program. Producers want it all in the F1 and don't realize it might be in the F3 or F4 that they see the progress they want. So, these producers keep jumping to different breeds and different type of sheep and overall they are making an inconsistent, non-uniform product with all the changes. There is another range producer in California, who uses the Polypay as his genetic base. His neighbors will bad mouth his sheep as carpet wool sheep but what his neighbors don't get is that with the polypay genetics and under the same conditions he is getting 50% more lambs and 15% less open ewes for the different in price of 20-21 micron wool of his neighbors against his 23 -24 micron wool. Just using a new breed doesn't make for all the changes, you have to have goals of what you want your end product to be and use selection along with genetics to make the changes. Plus, the most critical thing to remember is how the changes you make through selection and new genetics affect the utilization of your resources and are they efficient in today's competitive market. If you look at our Finn cross of the early 1970's against our Finn cross today, you will see a different sheep. Our main goal was to have a ewe that we could cross on a Suffolk ram and raise two lambs and have those lambs at the size and quality of what the processor wants in a typical CA lamb.

Today, that is a Yield 2 lamb of 135 to 140 lbs and both straight Finn cross and terminal cross lambs achieve that goal.

We produced a 1/4 Finn cross sheep until 1985 and at that point both my father and I felt we needed to introduce some new genetics in our sheep. In breeding the 1/4 Finn cross, we only used genetics from our original sources of Finn sheep and we never used a Polypay. The reason for our nonuse of the Polypay is that we felt through selection we made up the benefits of what a Polypay could bring us, plus we felt our sheep were overall bigger and more consistent and finer in wool quality. If the Polypay were already developed as a breed when my dad made his change we would have used the Polypay, but we developed a plan with Dr. Eric Bradford of UC Davis and we didn't want to deviate from it. So, in 1986, my dad and I decided we could use more prolificacy in our sheep and we had found a source of 1/2 Finn-1/4 Targhee-1/4 Rambouillet sheep in Montana that were selected in a similar manner to our sheep. We purchased 1/2 Finn-1/2 Targhee rams from Art Christensen and started to make a 3/8 Finn- 3/8 Targhee- 1/4 Rambouillet cross sheep. This is our present composite cross today. When we made the 3/8 Finn cross, we tested it for a few years to see how it did against our 1/4 Finn cross.

Our wool sells under the term "original bag". "Original bag" means that we produce enough wool that it doesn't need to be pooled with other producers' wool, so our wool sells as Hamilton Bros. Ranch wool and how it sells depends on the quality and consistency of our micron reports. We do belong to a Cal Wool Marketing Assn., a coop, which acts as our selling agent. Even in bad wool markets, quality wool will sell before bad quality wool. We skirt and class our wool and it is marketed in 2 lines. Our A line is ~85% of our wool and it is a 62's clip which is 22.05 to 23.49 microns and our A1 line is a 60's clip which is 23.50 to 24.94 microns.

When people look at our 3/8 Finn cross, they can't believe that they have that much Finn in them based on their size, conformation and wool quality. What I tell people when they visit our ranch is that we developed our cross to work for our operation and that it might not work for you. If you are going to take something from my experience, take the idea that there are a lot of tools available to help you make improvements to your operation, so you can be successful in the sheep industry.

The single most important thing to the success of my family's sheep operation has been the Finnsheep. Without the benefits of the Finn, we couldn't have made the changes that we needed to make to have a chance to survive in a global market.

(Editor's note: The very first issue of Short Tales in 1980 featured an article on its from page about the Christensen Family of Montana from whom the Hamilton Brothers, above, bought their Finn/Targhee/Rambouillet crosses. The Christensen's bought their first Finns in 1972 and at the time Margaret Christensen wrote the article, had about 500 1/2 Finns, 1/2 Targhees.)

CRIMP AND WOOL GRADING

by Debbie Minikhiem, Research Associate, Wool Lab Director, Montana Wool Lab, Dept. of Animal and Range Sciences, Montana State University

Debbie Minikheim's background includes two years at Texas A & M's Wool and Mohair Research Lab s, and Montana Wool Lab for five years. She is a certified Level II Classer, American Sheep Industry

Crimp is correlated with wool fineness. It has been shown that typically, the finer the wool, the tighter the crimp (smaller crimp, or more waves per inch.) The coarser the wool, the bigger and bolder the crimp (fewer waves per inch). Each breed has its own average fiber diameter range that the wool should measure. And, each breed has a particular character that represents typical wool of that breed. So, for registered sheep, it is of the utmost importance that the wool look like it should for that breed. You will have a certain type of crimp, and a certain grade range.

Ideally, wool growers should have their wool measured (micron tested). The next best thing would be to have it graded by a certified wool classer. When trying to visually appraise wool grade, a person has to take into account ALL the information known about the sheep and wool -- adult or lamb, ewe or ram, pregnant or open, breed, nutritional or environmental stresses, what the wool measured last year if it was measured, how soft or harsh the wool feels, the length, the number of months' growth, presence of hair and kemp, how much bolder the crimp is on the britch compared to the side and shoulder, how greasy, maybe even the size of the sheep. But, most of all, wool graders do look at crimp. But it definitely shouldn't be the only thing they look at, because it can be deceiving. In my opinion, handle (softness) is just as important. I have a display of wool staples lined up from finest to coarsest. They were actually measured, and some of them have crimp that corresponds to their grade, and others do not.

To sum it up, usually:

- the smaller the waves (crimp), the finer
- the softer, the finer
- lamb finer than adult
- ewe finer than ram
- less nutrition can cause finer wool
- pregnant ewes finer than open ewes
- shorter wool is finer than longer
- smaller sheep are finer than larger
- fine wool less likely to have hair or kemp
- fine wool greasier than coarse wool

In all sheep, britch wool is typically coarser, but if it is more than a grade coarser (or much bolder crimp) than the side wool, that could indicate the wool is coarser (coarse wool is more variable than fine).

We recommend culling animals with unusual crimp, and at least having the ram's wool measured. Also, don't cull sheep prematurely, because lamb's wool changes as the sheep matures. Lambs that have long hairs sticking out every where, shouldn't be culled since the long hairs fall out later and are no problem.

Major Factors Influencing Fiber Diameter

(reproduced with the permission of Yocom MCColl Testing Laboratories,
540 West Elk Place, Denver CO 80216-1823 (303 294 0582) www.ymccoll.com)

Three factors have a primary impact on fiber diameter: age, sex, and level of nutrition. As the animal matures, the fiber tends to have a higher or coarser micron value. Males frequently possess a higher micron value than females. The level of nutrition affects fiber diameter results as overfed animals produce higher micron values than those on a maintenance diet. This does not mean that animals should be underfed to produce finer fiber.

Underfeeding causes significant negative side effects, such as lowered fertility, smaller birth weights, and higher infant mortality rates. Fiber animals should be maintained on a thrifty diet to produce animals that live up to their genetic fiber potential. The safest guidelines to follow are those which follow animal husbandry practices suitable for your farm's location and the advice of a veterinarian familiar with your stock. An unsound or unhealthy animal is a poor risk in a breeding program regardless of its fiber diameter results.

Genetics and selection are fundamental to producing sound animals with fine fiber. The fiber samples for individual animals included in our Laserscan database since June of 1994 appear to represent a broad genetic base in the U.S. A diverse genetic base creates opportunities for selection of desirable traits, including fiber fineness. A word of caution in animal selection, focusing on one trait increases the risk of negative traits which might be linked to the one being selected. Selecting for fiber fineness decreases the body size and fleece weights.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM TWENTY YEARS OF SHORT TALES! REAL FINNPOWER!!

- *In 1981 a purebred Finn Glen Avon ram owned by Mrs. Harold Judy and sons, topped the 5th Annual Ohio Ram Test Sale*
- *In 1981, at the National Finnsheep sale, a Bloxham fall born ram topped the sale at \$1,000.*
- *In 1983 a University of Minnesota Finn ewe # 3266 had septuplets as did a four year old Finn owned by Dick Bloxham.*
- *In 1985 at the age of 61 months, #8805 also had seven lambs.*
- *In 1986 at the Keystone Sale in PA, the top selling ram at the National Finnsheep Sale went for \$1,000 and was consigned by Edwin Root and sons and purchased by Bunker Hill Farm.*
- *In 1987 at the Central States Regional Finnsheep Sale in IL, Clear Hills Finnsheep of Alberta, Canada sold the top ram for \$1,000 to William Engebretson of Wisconsin.*
- *Longevity: Two Glen Avon ewes gave birth at the ages of 108 and 111 months. Another ewe from the Williamson flock gave birth at 121 months. The Bonham flock had one lamb at 118 months. Another lambed at 108 months in the Leonard Amendt flock.*
- *1989, Super Ewe: A Magee Finn ewe had 17 lambs in four lambings on the Star system by the age of 36 months (1986).*
- *1990 Super Ewe of the Year, Magee 205 had 13 live lambs in 22 months on the Star system. She raised all but one of her lambs. Her lambing percentage was 583%. Runners up were a Maurice ewe with a lambing rate of 578%, a Jones ewe with 468% and a Hunter ewe with a lambing rate of 518%.*
- *1991, Glen Avon 57 gave birth to triplets at 145 months of age.*
- *1991 Super Ewe of the Year, a Maurice fall born triplet had 14 lambs in her two years of lambing for a lambing rate of 694%.*
- *1993, Leanne Mason's ewe FSW 2061 had triplets in March and again in August. She was 10 years old.*

- *1994, Geraldine Reno wrote in about Jenn, born in 1986, who at that time had had four sets of sextuplets, two sets of quintuplets, a set of quads, and one of triplets and was due to lamb again in June.*
- *1994, Grace Hatton wrote in about GH 16, out of Magee stock, born in 1991 who had already had 16 lambs in 43 months. As of 2000, she's still producing, due in March, and has had 34 live lambs for a 425% LIVE lambing rate- - so far!*
- *1997, there was great excitement about the Finnsheep semen importation from Finland.*
- *1999, At the New Jersey Wool Sheepbreeders 7th Annual Harvest Festival in Woodstown, NJ, Gert Schockley's yearling white Finn ram took Reserve Supreme Grand Champion Ram and Carol Winchell's yearling colored Finn took Reserve Supreme Grand Champion Ewe.*

Editors note: Please send us all your FINNPOWER news. Since registrations have been outsourced, we no longer know when your grand old girls have given birth. Send all news of septuplets, superewe info, great sale prices, births from imported semen and all the exciting news from your flocks to Short Tales editor, Grace Hatton, HC 8 Box 8151, Hawley, PA 18428 or email: [hatton@microserve.net!](mailto:hatton@microserve.net)

FINNSHEEP IN CYBERSPACE:

The FBA webpage had over 3500 hits in two years. Over 1,000 were from the US. 182 were from Finland. Over 60 each were from Sweden and Australia. There were hits from 31 other countries as well.

FINN EMAIL FROM AUSTRALIA

From: Steve Jones <gippfinn@net-tech.com.au>
 To: Stillmeadowfinns@hotmail.com

Subject: Membership
 Date: Sun, 12 Dec 1999 16:42:59 +1100

Dear Elizabeth,


We are probably the largest breeders of Finnsheep in Australia. We are the only breeders with registered American Finnsheep, purchased from Jack Judy. All our sheep are white. We also have genetics from three other importations of Finnsheep into Australia. We are currently negotiating to make a further importation of Finns from South Africa. We have over two hundred Finnsheep, and several hundred Finncrosses which are used for prime lamb production. The two most interesting crosses we have are Finn-East Friesian and Finn- Texel.

The Finn-Friesian cross gives a larger sheep with stronger wool but a much heavier fleece and is the best milking and mothering sheep we have seen. These sheep would easily milk a gallon a day, and it is nothing for a ewe to raise quads on only indifferent pasture and produce 180 lb plus of lambs at weaning @ 12 weeks. All our sheep live outdoors all year without shelter.

The Finn- Texel is an excellently muscled sheep and will easily raise 200% + lambs each lambing and if mated back to the Texel sire these lambs will easily meet the best carcass quality specifications. These sheep will totally transform the lamb industry over the next twenty years.

We have also a number of experimental crosses which we are assessing.

We are interested in joining the American Finnsheep Breeder's Association, registering our sheep with you, appearing in your member's directory and in receiving your newsletters. Is this possible?

		• Ram Semen Collection & Distribution
		• Annual Ram Semen Catalog
		• Artificial Insemination
		• Embryo Transfer
		• Gourley Scope™
Elite Genetics/Elite Visions Dr. Dennis and Deb Gourley 605 Rossville Rd, Waukon, IA 52172		
Office: 319-568-4551 • Fax: 319-568-6370 • Lab: 319-568-4847		
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Email: anzar@rockbridge.net**

MEMBERSHIP SERVICES

NAME: _____ () life membership \$35
ADDRESS: _____ () Breeders Directory \$30

() annual dues \$25
PHONE: _____ EMAIL: _____ () flock prefix, \$10 per letter

Amount enclosed \$ _____

LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Check one: Purebred breeder (), Commercial producer (), Other ()

I/we agree to be governed by the rules, regulation, constitution, and bylaws of the association as amended from time to time, and to keep a written memorandum of breeding, exact birth dates, and litter size of Finnsheep, and further that I/we will furnish promptly any information concerning same at any time when requested to do so by the association. A remittance of \$35 is enclosed (includes annual dues payment).

Signed _____ Date _____
Signed _____ Date _____

BREEDERS' DIRECTORY LISTING

Fee: \$30 per three issue year - - January 2000 to December 2000 - - FBA members only - - Includes web page listing. The directory is sent to people inquiring about the breed and to fairs and shows. Please check:

Purebred Finns (), Crossbred Finns (), What crosses? _____

Other info. Not counting your name and address, email, webpage, health status re: OPP and Scrapie, you are allowed 20 words to describe what you offer. Over 20 words is \$1 per line which must be included with Breeders Directory Listing Payment. _____

ANNUAL DUES: Fee: \$25 If you do not pay the fee you will not receive the FBA newsletter, Short Tales and you registration fees will be doubled. _____

FLOCK PREFIX: \$10 per letter. A flock prefix enables exclusive use of your name or that of your farm or flock on registrations. You could use your last name, the full name of your farm or some initials. _____

Instructions: for all of the above member services, mail checks to the FBA Secretary, Elisabeth Luke, HC 65 Box 495, DeRuyter, NY 13052

FOR REGISTRATIONS AND TRANSFERS: Send all information to the Finnsheep Breeders' Association, 1557 173rd Ave., Milo, IA 50166, phone (515) 942 6402, fax (515) 942 6502, worldsheep@aol.com

Fees:(double for non-members or those who have not paid annual dues or on animals over 12 months of age)

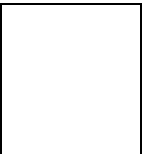
Class I (purebred animals) -- \$6	transfer of ownership -----\$4
Class II (crossbred animals)	Pedigrees -----\$5
1. 1/2 Finn -----\$2	Duplicates -----\$1
2. 3/4 Finn -----\$6	
3. 7/8 Finn -----\$6	

FINNSHEEP BREEDERS' ASSOCIATION MISSION STATEMENT

The Finnsheep Breeders' Association of the USA:

- ❖ **Provides a national pedigree breed recording system for Finnsheep**
- ❖ **Maintains the Finnsheep breed standard for the USA**
- ❖ **Promotes animal health within the breed and nationally**
- ❖ **Fosters and promotes the proliferation and marketing of Finnsheep within the national industry and abroad**
- ❖ **Is a national focal point for Finnsheep Breeders**
- ❖ **Disseminates timely information to members on all matters relating to the breed**

Finnsheep Breeders' Association
HC 65 Box 495
DeRuyter, NY 13052



ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

