

# “Our Finns Pay”

## SMALL FLOCK ADVANTAGES



Finns offer gainfulness in lamb yields, fleece quality and friendly, easy-to-manage demeanor.

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My background with sheep began with the study of woven fabrics, which led to handspinning and then to my first crossbred sheep in 1977. These Finn-Shropshires introduced me to the world of shepherding, which was to become my chosen lifestyle.

In 1992 I found a long sought farmstead nestled in the hills of central New York. Bordered by a state forest, the south facing meadowland seemed to be the perfect place to keep sheep. My choice this time was for purebred Finnsheep. Beyond the fascination of raising a heritage breed with origins dating back several hundred years, my prevailing motivation was for a profitable enterprise.

We chose to erect a well ventilated greenhouse-type livestock shelter, to enable year round lambing. Initially utilizing Cornell University's STAR system of intensive breeding, the Finns proved to be an ideal choice. This system involves three distinct groups of ewes, managed for lamb

births at 73-day intervals throughout the year, providing consistent meat sales.

When emphasizing commercial lamb production, the Finns bring to the table a particularly tender, juicy, mild-flavored meat which isn't flawed by excess fat, even when harvested beyond a year of age. In my experience, purebred grass-fed Finn lambs can yield a 55 percent hanging weight at 75 to 80 pounds by eight months of age, providing efficient meat-to-bone ratio due to the lighter bones of the breed.

Their early maturity allows rapid cash return and the current popularity with multi-cultural groups continues to rise.

Additionally, Finn-sired ewes from other breeds are substantially more prolific, which offers great advantage (regarding rapid payback of investment).



Author's Finn ewe Tuula, with her sextuplets, all born without human assistance.

### EASIER MANAGEMENT

We transitioned to annual spring lambing here many years ago. The ewes are more relaxed being managed in one group, where they graze and rest together.

Litter sizes have slightly increased with three to five being typical (on rare occasion, sextuplets or septuplets).

An added advantage was the reduction in grain expense since the lambs' nutritional needs are met by dams' milk and grazing.

All our lambs reach breeding size or become well-grown freezer lambs by November. The flock has readily adapted to whatever lambing schedule we desired.

Another factor that stands out dramatically in Finns is their amazingly friendly temperament, which makes them popular for 4-H projects and family farms. In contrast to many other breeds, Finnsheep most often seek out their human companions. How nice it is when your flock comes to greet you rather than taking flight!

Present emphasis at Stillmeadow Finnsheep farm is for raising purebred seed stock. With much attention to genetic development we also prioritize the highest health status. Our original white ewes helped establish maternal strength and fleece quality. Through introduction of differing rams we now have a flock developed over seven generations in which our ewes mature early, lamb with ease, and readily suckle up to four lambs with no assistance.

A lesser known niche product is the Finnsheep fleece. Not only is this wool both soft and lustrous, many natural colors and markings have become common within the breed. Fiber artists treasure it for use in handspinning, felt making, knitting, crochet, and weaving. Freshly shorn clean fleeces can command prices upwards of \$15 per pound when marketed to a target audience.



Author's granddaughter Adelia, with the two ewes that follow her everywhere.

Plenty of opportunity exists for those who wish to pursue this unique breed: Finnsheep genetics have assisted the development of more than 20 breeds worldwide, including the Polypay and the Rideau Arcott, a dairy breed. With continuing care the Finn traits will be available for future generations of shepherds. ♀