



Greeting BBSAI Members!

As usual, we have a lot of information to squeeze into one newsletter. We hope you are enjoying these emailed newsletters. If there is anything you think we could do better, please let us know.

Note: If your email program is not set to accept HTML text, you have received a text-only version of this newsletter, which is boring because you can't see graphics and tables. If you would like to see what you've missed, or if you would like to download the newsletter from BBSAI's Web site, go to http://www.blackbellysheep.org/newsletter/BBSAI_newsletter_January2005.htm

January, 2005

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Barbados Blackbelly Sheep Association International Newsletter
1156 NE 50th Road
Lamar, MO 64759
(417) 398-2526 or (417) 398-9500
E-mail: secretary@blackbellysheep.org
The Association's website is:
www.blackbellysheep.org

The Barbados Blackbelly Sheep Association International Newsletter is a benefit of membership in the BBSAI and is published quarterly. BBSAI was established to conserve and promote the Barbados Blackbelly and American Blackbelly sheep breeds. Annual membership is \$30.00, and includes the newsletter. We also accept unsolicited donations. Please send changes of address to BBSAI. All contributions are tax-deductible to the extent provided by law.

The BBSAI Newsletter welcomes articles, photographs, letters and classified ads that deal with American Blackbelly and Barbados Blackbelly Sheep. Publication of articles or advertisements is not necessarily an endorsement by BBSAI. No part of the BBSAI Newsletter (including photographs) can be reprinted, put on websites or used in any manner without the written permission of the President or Secretary of the Association. Issue deadlines for articles and ads are:

January - December 15
April - March 15
July - June 15
October - September 15

BBSAI Officers

Joshua Weimer, President: president@blackbellysheep.org
Mark Fleming, Secretary/Treasurer: secretary@blackbellysheep.org

Regional Directors

Carol J. Elkins: celkins@criterhaven.biz
James E. Harper: jharper53@erols.com
Mary Swindell: mwindel@siu.edu

Advisors

Susan Schoenian, Sheep and Goats Western Maryland
Research and Education Center—Marketing Advisor

Webmistress

Carol J. Elkins: webmistress@blackbellysheep.org

President's Corner

By Josh Weimer

I hope this edition of the BBSAI News finds each of you having a wonderful Christmas and a happy New Year. We had a great year with a lot of new things happening. To those of you who have contributed throughout the year in making things happen, I would like to personally thank you. It takes members such as you to be able to make an association successful. I would only hope that we could make this coming year half as great as 2004 was.

Anyone wishing to help with upcoming committees or events please give me a call. One such committee will be in charge of drafting a new set of standards for the American Blackbelly for the members to vote on. This is one of my major goals for 2005. I do not feel as though a lot of change needs to be done to the standards for horned stock, only minor tweaking to better serve and represent the American Blackbelly. Maybe no change needs to be made at all; that is what we need to take a closer look at.

If you are interested, please e-mail me at president@blackbellysheep.org or give me a call at 417-398-2526 or 417-398-9500.

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Recap of the 2004 BBSAI Annual Meeting and Workshop

September 11 – 12, 2004

Bellwether Farm

Cobden, Illinois

Last year 2004 BBSAI Annual Meeting and Workshop was held at Illinois Regional Director Mary Swindell's Bellwether Farm in Cobden, Illinois on Saturday and Sunday, September 11th and 12th.



The two-day series of events included a full roster of several excellent workshops, seminars, farm tours and demonstrations provided by visiting expert speakers and BBSAI directors. Plenty of excellent food each day was provided by the kids and parents of the Fourteen Leaps 4-H Club. We also enjoyed a delicious banquet dinner Saturday evening at the historic and beautiful Giant City State Park Lodge. We were also treated to a tour of the neighboring farm of Walter Stubbs, President of the Illinois Lamb and Wool Producers, who presented two talks and demonstrations at his farm. And of course we enjoyed the exhibit of Mary Swindell's flock of Barbados Blackbelly sheep on her farm site.

Our event was attended by BBSAI members and other interested sheep breeders from throughout the continental United States, representing the states of New York, Virginia, Alabama, Utah, Colorado, Missouri, and Oregon, as well as several from Illinois. Participants who had signed up in advance received a nice BBSAI logo t-shirt. All participants received packets with seminar notes and a schedule. And many of us went home with our arms full of sheep-related items from the BBSAI's silent auction.

The farm was decorated with lovely banners showing the colorful BBSAI logo (polled and horned rams), as well as festive tents for outdoor dining and demonstrations. On Saturday morning, we kicked off the event with a hearty welcome from BBSAI President Josh Weimer. With breakfast snacks and coffee in hand, we then began the day's roster of learning and adventure activities.

The first seminar was an intriguing and excellent media presentation on the History and Preservation of Barbados Blackbelly Sheep, by Carol Elkins. Using computerized maps to show migration/transfer routes of ancestral sheep breeds, Carol visually demonstrated the complex historical steps in the development of the modern-day Blackbelly breeds, as well as the crucial need for preserving these sheep, which are in danger of being cross-bred out of existence throughout the world.



This was followed by a lively outdoor demonstration of ranch chores using stock dogs, by Kay Carr, Mary Swindell, and their various border collies. While Mary spoke about the advantages of using dogs for gathering, sorting, and driving sheep for various daily farm tasks such as worming, foot care, and paddock exchanges, Kay demonstrated long-range gathers of the flock to the delight of the viewers. The dogs adeptly routed groups of sheep through gates, chutes, and alleys at the handler's bidding. The friendly border collies won the hearts of many participants, and several breeders at the meeting went home hoping to get a good herding dog to assist them with their own flocks.

Next Dr. John Wiemers, DVM from the USDA/APHIS office spoke to the group about the upcoming National Animal I.D. Program, its importance, implementation plans and the prospective timetable for sheep breeders. While Dr. Wiemers' subject material was sobering and a little overwhelming to most of us, he presented it in a helpful and friendly manner and assured us that as time draws nearer for the required implementation of this program, more information and assistance would be provided by the USDA.



Carol Elkins then gave a presentation on record keeping and tagging, including a display of actual samples of the many brands and types of ear tags available. She discussed various record keeping techniques (from pen and paper, to various computerized programs), and the components of a record keeping system (what to write down, and how to organize your information). She covered the basics of the required and voluntary scrapie eradication programs, and explained why record keeping and ear tagging are requirements of those programs. And when demonstrating the ear tags, Carol brought out actual dried sheep ears (!) so that we could all learn to tag correctly in an actual sheep ear. We were all impressed with how thoughtful Carol was to bring these (ha ha), especially right before lunch!

Lunch was a wonderful lasagna meal, with table service that equaled the finest restaurants, and was provided by the charming boys and girls from the Fourteen Leaps 4-H Club of Anna, Illinois.

Afterwards, we were treated to an excellent presentation on marketing strategies, by entrepreneurial sheep rancher Tammie Rogers, from Brownstown, Illinois. Tammie has an Illinois retailer's (meat broker's) license, and has several marketing avenues for her sheep. She spoke to the group about defining the attributes of your (sheep) product, defining your costs and desired profit, determining whether you want to market your product through conventional channels or to establish a niche market instead, and finally, identifying your customers and communicating your product's value to your customers.



James Harper then presented a workshop on parasite identification and management for sheep breeders. We began with a pre-test, which proved (for at least some of us!) how little we know about internal parasites to which our sheep are subject. James then presented background information about parasite life cycles and infestations in flocks, and allowed each of us to examine fecal samples taken from the flock there, under microscopes. We were shown how to do a fecal count and determine the seriousness of the infestation from this data. At the end of his presentation, we accompanied James to the barn area where we isolated a sheep in a head gate, and James taught each of us how to do the "third eyelid test" to determine the level of anemia which often accompanies a serious worm load in sheep.

BBSAI President Josh Weimer brought a complete DS Livestock working chute to the Meeting, and demonstrated it to the group. This chute contained a ramp, an elevated working area, and a head catcher gate in which to hold a sheep for various examination chores, hoof trimming, and other needs. Following the DS chute demonstration, Mary Swindell demonstrated the use of a sheep chair for setting up sheep. Mary also spoke about hoof trimming techniques, and gave a foot trimming demonstration using her sheep.



Following Saturday's activities, we all met for dinner at the historic Giant City State Park Lodge, and enjoyed a relaxing and pleasant evening, dining and visiting.

Early Sunday morning after gathering at the farm for coffee and doughnuts, we drove caravan-style to neighbor Walter Stubbs' farm. Walt is president of the Illinois Lamb and Wool Producers association. He demonstrated the "slotted floor" feeding technique for raising lambs to market weight. He also spoke about his experiences with Livestock Guardian Dogs, and we all got to meet his Pyrenees guardian dog, Nan. Also, Walt was the primary organizer of the Shawnee Lamb and Wool Pool, and he gave a talk concerning how to organize a Lamb Pool in your area, and spoke about the advantages of having a Lamb Pool available to market your sheep.

After we returned from Walt's farm, we organized into an open discussion forum with the group of 4-H members who were present. BBSAI Directors presented the case to the 4-Hers and Meeting participants that we believe successful promotion of our sheep breed is closely connected with successful exhibiting and competitive showing at county and state fairs. We want to enable 4-H and FFA youth to become more knowledgeable and interested in Blackbelly sheep, and we would like help and suggestions from the 4-H members themselves to find ways to make this possible. A thoughtful discussion followed, and we came away with many new ideas about a promotional 4-H and FFA program for Blackbelly sheep, thanks to the input from everyone.

Another excellent lunch was served by our 4-H group, again with top notch table service. Following lunch, those who hadn't seen Mary's Barbados Blackbelly sheep yet had a chance to look at them on exhibit. After the sheep exhibit, the silent auction closed and winners of the various items were announced. This marked the close of the Workshop portion of the Annual Meeting. The BBSAI Board and other BBSAI members then moved to the house for the business meeting.



On the whole, the Annual Meeting was a tremendous success, and participants came away loaded with information -- arms full of handouts, catalogs, presentation notes, and heads full of good ideas for their own flocks. We met wonderful folks from all over the country who share with us the love of these delightful Blackbelly sheep breeds, and who have renewed their dedication and enthusiasm for the breed by attending the Meeting. This year we certainly hope to see many of the same faces again next year, and also hope to see many new folks as well. This year the BBSAI 2005 Annual Meeting and Workshop will be on June 22-23, 2005 and located at Virginia State University in Petersburg, Virginia at their Randolph Farm.

Sincerely,
Mary Swindell

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Member Spotlight—Barb Lee, Oregon City, Oregon

When asked to provide a profile for the newsletter, I was reluctant to agree, because my association with American Blackbelly sheep is so new. I was finally persuaded, but present myself simply as a new member with a few sheep who aspires to be a responsible breeder.

My first up-close experience with a blackbelly was in central Oregon, where a friend had captured an escaped ewe and didn't know if it was a goat or a sheep. I declared that I thought it was a "Barbados" Blackbelly sheep, which was ultimately confirmed. (At the time I did not know the difference between horned and polled sheep.) The ewe was returned to her owners after the captors traced the origin of her scrapie tag.

I fell in love with the timorous, foot-stamping little creature, and decided that I was going to acquire some to become part of my farm renovation plans.

I acquired my first sheep from neighbors (and BBSAI members) Casey and Michelle Storey. I quickly learned to take plenty of time whenever I looked out my window to watch my beautiful new sheep lounging under the ancient apple trees. I was smitten. I wanted more.

As my education evolved, thanks to the BBSAI website, and most especially through frequent visits to Carol Elkins' website, I became more and more aware of the opportunity that exists to make an impact on the breed. But what breed? Though I found the available information relatively cut and dried about polled vs. horned stock, there still seemed to be a fair amount of confusion, and it was difficult as a newcomer to sort out just exactly which path to follow. That's when I decided that one way or another, I was going to make the trip to the annual meeting. I needed to see more sheep and talk at length to people who really know them.

It turned out that this was the smartest thing I could have possibly done. Arriving early at Mary Swindell's

beautiful farm, I was immediately absorbed into the fellowship that defined the entire weekend. I saw polled Barbados Blackbellies that anyone would have been proud to have browsing their paddocks. I had heart to heart talks with breeders of both polled and horned Blackbellies. With earnest advice, a much better understanding of the goals of the BBSAI, and solid faith in my own motivations, I confidently focused my future on the newly named American Blackbelly horned sheep.

There was much excitement at the meeting when the votes were tallied and the American Blackbelly emerged as its own distinct breed. What other species of livestock offers so many exciting opportunities for the breeder to have an impact on quality, and to set the standards for the future. Raising polled stock is an equally exciting task, with challenges and rewards unique to preserving a fragile gene pool. I confess that I like the horns of the American Blackbelly and received plenty of enthusiastic encouragement to pursue my dream of building a quality flock of horned American Blackbellies.

As I spend most of my free time (and all of my expendable income), reinforcing my fences and planning my facilities, I also apply myself to learning techniques for grazing that will have a positive impact on the health of my soils, my animals and ultimately us humans. In this respect, my sheep are my indispensable partners. It's the most exciting job I've ever accepted, and in a way the scariest. Once you make the commitment, there's no turning back. Promising the soil you'll leave it better than you found it, and promising yourself you'll leave a magnificent breed of sheep even better than when you started out...those are big promises to keep!

I am really glad that I have actively sought out the support of the BBSAI and the dedicated folks behind the scenes. With their help and encouragement, I have really sharpened my focus on breeding American Blackbellies. It's been a real comfort to know that as I stumble along gaining more understanding about the sheep, the friends I've made in the BBSAI have been so willing to support me and help launch me as a new breeder.

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New Members

- Victoria Howard - Peculiar, MO
- Corey Vann - Knoxville, MD
- Susan Young - Englewood, FL
- Edward & Placida Cardoza - Nocona, TX

We welcome you into our flock!

Members, we are looking for new members and friends to share the love, preservation, and dedication of our breed. Herd new members and friends to join BBSAI. In exchange you will receive two FREE Certificates of Registry.

Membership Renewals

- Lindsey Jacobson - Sun Prairie, WI
- E.J. Christiansen - Petaluma, CA.

Thank you for staying with our flock!

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Calendar of Blackbelly Events

American Blackbelly and Barbados Blackbelly Sheep are being displayed and/or advertised at the following sheep and wool festivals:

- **Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival:** May 6-7, 2005 (<http://www.sheepandwool.org>)
- **World Sheep & Fiber Arts Festival:** September 2-4, 2005 (<http://www.worldsheepfest.com>)
- **Virginia State Fair:** September 22 - October 2, 2005 (<http://www.statefair.com>)
- **North American Hair Sheep Symposium and Sale Spur Arena; San Angelo, Texas:** October 6 and 7, 2005
- The **2005 BBSAI Workshop and Annual Meeting** will be held at Virginia State University, in Petersburg, Virginia on June 22 and 23, 2005 (this will be a Wednesday and Thursday). Additional information about the 2005 Meeting will appear in the next issue of this newsletter. We certainly hope to see many of the same faces again next year, and also hope to see many new folks as well. Stay tuned for upcoming announcements, and plan to join us next year for another weekend of fun, laughter, and learning!

If you know of any upcoming events in which American Blackbelly or Barbados Blackbelly Sheep are participating, e-mail jharper53@erols.com.

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BBSAI Secretary/Treasurer Update

Before we embark on a new year, let's first take a look back at some of the Association's highlights and accomplishments in 2004:

Memberships

We had a very productive year by picking up 16 new members, and 16 of our members renewed their memberships. Please take note, we have updated the Membership Application on the Association's web site. Also, as you know the membership types and fees were revised in the new by-laws. Those are:

- Lifetime- \$200 one time fee; one vote
- Family—\$45 annually, for two people, joining as a team; one vote
- Regular—\$30 annually; one vote
- Associate—\$25 annually; for sponsors; no vote
- Youth—\$15 annually; youth under 18; no vote

As an on-going reminder, in an effort to simplify the membership process, we have established July as the expiration and renewal month. In the past, we have had membership renewals due each month. This system caused some financial constraints to many members. Plus, this is an effort to cut down on the time consumed with the correspondence each month, as well as to provide a consistent service to our members. Until we transition everyone to July memberships, we have worked out a special cost share plan. In this plan, no one

will be out any additional money. You will pay only your normal dues or the proration rate to July. To help you understand this, I am including a chart later in this update. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Registrations

Currently we have 815 sheep in the BBSAI registry. In 2004, we had 86 new sheep registrations and transferred ownership on 16 sheep already in the registry. The Application for Registration has also been updated on the Web site for your use.

Annual Meeting Voting Results

Ballots were mailed in early July to 105 members that were eligible to vote. Twenty-nine of the ballots were returned to me by the deadline in late August. Members voted on revising our by-laws; new Board of Directors; and the possible renaming of the horned barbado to either: American Blackbelly, American Barbado, or to remain Barbado.

- By-Laws—The by-laws were rewritten to protect the Association and to ensure that it has a legal foundation on which to operate. Approved: 29 to 4.
- Board of Directors—Carol Elkins, Mary Swindell, and James Harper were selected to the Board. Approved: 29 to 4.
- Renaming the Horned Barbado—The American Blackbelly was selected as the name to represent the horned Barbado. Approved: 17 out of 29 votes.

2004 Financial Summary of the Association

Here is a look at how we stand financially:

	2004		2004	
	Budgeted Fixed Expenses		Actual Fixed Expenses	
Telephone Fees		\$60.00		\$20.00
Web Site Fees		\$95.40		\$143.10
	2004		2004	
	Budgeted Discretionary Expenses		Actual Discretionary Expenses	
Postage Fees		\$213.60		\$199.09
Office Supplies		\$240.00		\$236.67
Newsletter		\$60.00		\$61.00
Annual Meeting		\$60.00		\$572.21
Note: Includes workshop t-shirts and petty cash for working capital				
Advertising		\$150.00		\$25.00
Organizational		\$0.00		\$25.00
Note: Oklahoma Secretary of State filing fees				
Total Expenses		\$879.00		\$1,118.97
	2004		2004	
	Estimated Income		Actual Income	
Memberships		\$425.00		\$1,075.00
Registrations		\$395.00		\$330.50
Transfers		\$0.00		\$76.00
CafePress		\$60.00		\$53.73
Advertisements		\$0.00		\$30.00
Newsletter Postage		\$0.00		\$90.00
Additional Income		\$25.00		\$1,075.50
Note: Includes monies generated from silent auctions, workshop fees, donations, etc. from Annual Mtg				
Total Income		\$905.00		\$2,677.00
Current Bank Balance as of December 15				\$2,692.52

Mailing and E-mail Addresses

Please be sure to notify me if your mailing address or e-mail address has changed. If you are having problems receiving the newsletter or need help in setting your e-mail, please contact newsletter@blackbellysheep.org. As a reminder, if you do not want the e-mail version, there is a \$10 mailing fee for four issues of the newsletter.

Membership Proration Chart

MembershipType	Associate	Regular	Family
AnnualDues	\$25.00	\$30.00	\$45.00
Prorated per month	\$2.10	\$2.50	\$3.75
January	\$14.50	\$17.50	\$26.25
February	12.40	15.00	22.50
March	10.30	12.50	18.75
April*	25.00	30.00	45.00
May*	25.00	30.00	45.00
June*	25.00	30.00	45.00
July †	25.00	30.00	45.00
August*	25.00	30.00	45.00
September	22.90	27.50	41.25
October	20.80	25.00	37.50
November	18.70	22.50	33.75
December	16.60	20.00	

*Floating months in which the July 2005, 2006, etc. would be established.

†July was used as the central month for all membership dues.

Examples:

(1) My regular membership dues are due in January at which time I would pay \$17.50 to July 2005. Then in July I would pay my \$30 and my membership would be extended until July 2006 and I would be on track for the future.

(2) Member A's membership is good until March 2005, at which time he would pay \$12.50, and then he would receive notification in June to renew his membership in July for \$30 which would extend him to July 2006 and he is on track.

(3) Member B's membership is good until October 2004 at which time she would pay \$25 which will take her to July 2005. Then she will pay \$30 and she will be on track.

2005 Budget of the Association

We have established a general budget for 2005 expenditures:

	2005	
	Budgeted Fixed Expenses	
Telephone Fees		\$60.00
Web Site Fees		\$95.40
	2005	
	Budgeted Discretionary Expenses	
Postage Fees		\$216.00
Office Supplies		\$240.00
Newsletter		\$36.00
Incorporation Fees		\$25.00
Annual Meeting		\$60.00
Advertising		\$75.00
Consultant Fees		\$150.00
4H/FFA Grant Program		\$75.00
BBSAI Brochures		\$250.00
Total Expenses		\$1,282.40
	2005	
	Estimated Income	
Memberships		\$720.00
Registrations		\$360.00
Transfers		\$15.00
CafePress		\$120.00
Advertisements		\$30.00
Newsletter Postage		\$40.00
Total Income		\$1,285.00

I hope each and every one of you have a happy and prosperous New Year. As a reminder, applications to become a member, renew your membership, or to register your sheep can be downloaded from the Association's web site at: www.blackbellysheep.org or you can contact me at my home address and I will glad to send them to you.

Mark Fleming
 1156 N.E. 50th Road
 Lamar, Missouri 64759
 (417) 398-2875
secretary@blackbellysheep.org

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What Does the American Blackbelly Name Do for You?

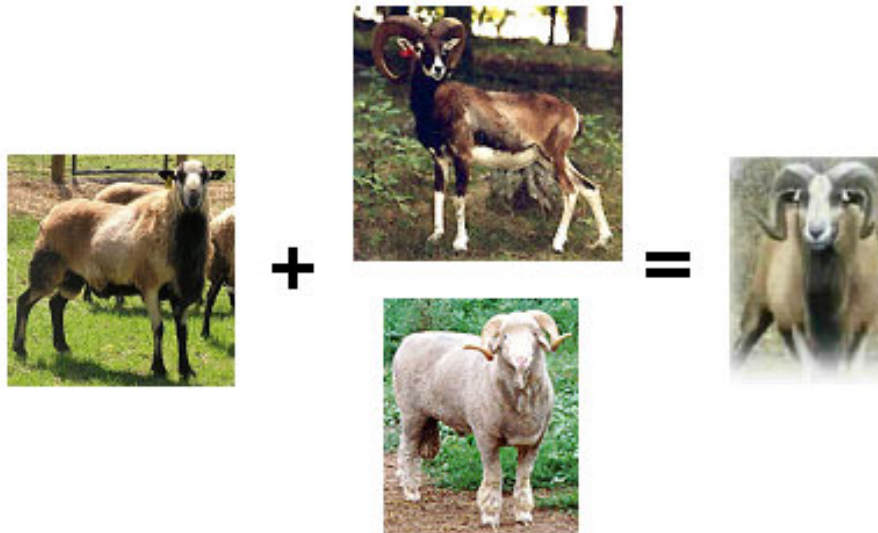
An editorial by Carol Elkins

As reported in the last newsletter, the BBSAI membership voted in the 2004 election to refer to barbado sheep that meet BBSAI breed standards by a brand new name—American Blackbelly. Although not unanimous, the vote was certainly a landslide in favor of the name change. One or two disgruntled members contacted the board to let us know they would continue to call their horned sheep Barbados Blackbelly regardless of what the membership wanted. I respect these folks' right to disagree and, to a certain extent, sympathize with them. After all, they have regarded their lovely horned rams as Barbados Blackbelly for years and I'm sure I would resent it too if someone tried to tell me that my sheep were not the same breed I'd been calling them.

Other members contacted us to thank us. They'd always been a little confused about the various names being bandied around and related how hard it was to sort through all the different information when they first acquired their blackbellies in order to find out what breed they were. Most BBSAI members have worked hard to breed their sheep to the standard set for Barbados Blackbelly sheep, and those members raising the horned breed are proud to have a name for their sheep that is unique and reflects the country in which the breed was developed. The American Blackbelly can now hold its own place in the list of sheep breeds and in a short time be recognized throughout the U.S. as a breed distinct from the Barbados Blackbelly, the barbado, the Corsican, or any of the other various names used to describe sheep that sort of look the same.

Now that you have a distinct breed name, what do you plan to do with it?

What makes an American Blackbelly sheep different from a Barbados Blackbelly or a barbado? Most members feel that the standard used for Barbados Blackbelly is a good place to start, with the addition of a horn standard. But the American Blackbelly is a composite of three different breeds of sheep and will genetically express those differences to varying degrees. Should the horns be supracervical (sweeping out and curving behind the neck), heart-shaped, or homonymous (sweeping outward in a spiral)? The ewes of the Mouflon are also horned—should American Blackbelly ewes be horned? The Rambouillet is a woolled sheep, the Mouflon a hair sheep. How much wool is acceptable in an American Blackbelly, if any? Mouflon traditionally have a light tan "saddle" coloration on their back; should that be part of the standard?



The list of questions is long and the American Blackbelly breed standard needs to take into consideration all of these factors when describing what the breed should look like. So, how do we develop the breed standard?

Your Board of Directors is in a bit of a quandary. Only two of us raise American Blackbellies and we don't feel we can adequately represent the membership in this very important development of the breed standard. We would like to see members who raise American Blackbelly sheep step forward and volunteer to join in a committee to be formed for the purpose of developing the American Blackbelly breed standard.

87% of the sheep registered with the BBSAI are American Blackbelly. 93% of the BBSAI membership raise American Blackbelly. If you think it would be a good idea if more American Blackbelly breeders took responsibility for the American Blackbelly breed standard, and if you would be willing to help in the effort,

please contact any board member. This is our number one priority for 2005 and we would like to form a committee of volunteers in January.

Committee members will meet via a conference line, and the only cost will be each member's personal long distance phone charges. We anticipate that three or four meetings will be required to brainstorm, develop a working draft, and finalize the standard. We hope to poll members who read this newsletter as we go along to ensure that we are on track.

This is your opportunity to have direct input into the standard that will define your sheep. Please don't let others who don't know your breed as well as YOU know your breed make these critical decisions.

VOLUNTEER NOW!

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Start the New Year as a Lamb Lover

If you love lamb, or have friends who do, give a little bit of that love to the BBSAI by purchasing the Lamb Lover's Cookbook. The cookbook is selling like hotcakes...er...lamb patties.

The BBSAI earns about \$5.00 for every cookbook sold. The cookbook assures the BBSAI of a continuing income independent of registrations and membership fees. With this income, we will be able to launch new programs to promote blackbelly sheep and establish a grant program for 4-H and FAA youth.



So hurry to the BBSAI Website at <http://www.blackbellysheep.org> and get your copy of the Lamb Lover's Cookbook. Just \$16.75 for spiral-bound hardcopy and \$13.99 for interactive CD. Share the love and get some of each!!

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Blackbellies and Sustainable Farming

By Barb Lee

This article is by no means intended to be an informative article, but rather a thought provoking one. When it comes to sustainable farming, I am a beginning beginner. But my heart is with leaving the earth a better place than I found it, and as a Blackbelly breeder, I have an opportunity to do that.

I have ten neglected acres in high-rainfall western Oregon. The soils are leached and depleted, and the fact that the land has been poorly managed for generations has added to its degradation. Don't get me wrong, in spring and early summer, the average Oregonian spends most of his time hacking back the jungle. But that doesn't mean the soil is rich or deep, it means that native species are adapted, and so are introduced species, such as blackberry. It's just part of the cycle in this area.

I have always liked sheep as potential livestock for this small place. I had a few commercial woolies many years ago and found I could handle them much more easily than cattle. The fact that my introduction to American Blackbellies and my decision to pursue the restoration of my land coincided can hardly be regarded as coincidence. Some things are meant to happen. Just looking at these beautiful, feral-appearing sheep brings me closer to the earth that sustains them. They inspire me to see how far I can go to complete a circle—a cycle—of life.

So what is sustainable farming? Well, by my definition, which is incomplete, it means giving back more to the earth than what we take. The result is lush, diversified swards of nutritious forage for our animals. It means sustained habitat for native wildlife. It means a net energy gain from our efforts, as opposed to depleted soils and other resources. But where to begin?

First, we need to accept, contrary to what some groups would have us believe, that our sheep are efficient and productive users of land. Our sheep can exist where nobody in their right mind would try to grow a vegetable crop. They can consume and digest what we can't, and in the process, create nutritious food for humans. They can make use of, and improve, soil that cannot be utilized for other purposes. Next, we need to stop thinking of ourselves so much as shepherds, but as grass farmers. As the grass grows, so grow our sheep. And as our sheep grow, so we grow. There is definitely no doubt that we are what we eat. So rather than just thinking of the grass as "food" for the sheep, perhaps just dumping some quick-acting chemical fertilizer on it to make more, and rotating pastures for the sole purpose of reducing parasite loads, we need to get close and personal with the grass, with its life cycles, with its symbiotic relationship with the soil's web of life, and we need to begin managing our animals with a consciousness about bringing them and the grass together at the right times, then taking them off at the right times.

If you study the growth habits of grass, the natural cycles of nature, and the effects of managed grazing on grass, it appears that grass was designed to be grazed in a natural sequence. If the animals are put on the grass at the right stage of growth, they keep it trimmed, which keeps it "vegetative" (growing), which means a longer grazing season. Shorter grasses allow legumes to express themselves by not being shaded out. Over time, managed grazing will encourage lower growing, nutritious "forage" type grasses over taller "hay" type grasses. As the grasses are "pruned", they shed their roots, which decay, creating humus and leaving tiny channels for air and water to filter through. They "tiller" and grow outward while the crowns remain strong, densifying the sward and choking out weeds. Grazed either too low or not at all, grass plants use up their energy and die out. The way we manage our grass can make a profound change in the sward in a short time without ever adding a single seed or pound of fertilizer.

"Set stocking" or allowing the animals to graze willy-nilly results in succulent varieties being overgrazed and killed out, while less palatable species thrive and increase, thus degrading the pasture. Managed grazing keeps the animals eating all available species, before being moved to the next paddock. By "committed" grazing standards, animals are allotted just what they will eat to satisfy them in one day, then moved on. Most of us would probably be lucky to move the animals once a week. Needless to say, in managed grazing, "the eye of the master maketh the cattle (or in our case sheep) fat." A good grazier can estimate how much land his animals will need on any given day, in any given phase of the cycle, to sustain them. Then he allots no more, no less.

Graziers like Joel Salatin believe that correct management of grasses and livestock will result in a net gain in soil fertility without the importation of expensive soil amendments and seeds. Every day, the wind, rain and passing wildlife drop millions of seeds on our pastures. We have only to encourage them with proper grazing techniques to get them to sprout. Salatin also believes that as deep rooted legumes take hold, their roots mine the subsoil for the minerals that have leached down out of reach of shallower-rooted grasses. These minerals are brought up to the surface and stored in the leaves. The leaves pass through the animals and the animals leave what they don't use on the surface, for the shallower rooted grasses to make use of. A net gain overall. By proper management, you have encouraged the deep rooted, nitrogen fixing legumes, you are "cycling nutrients" which are already available but previously locked up in the soil, you have animals contributing to, instead of stripping, their environment, you are building the web of life in the soil, and you are creating a healthful and nutritious source of food for yourself and others. This is sustainability – a net gain for the earth, for the animals, and for the humans.

There are a great many other considerations. Many of us wish to be completely organic. But what does that mean in terms of energy expense? Thoughtfully considered, It doesn't always mean that we are doing the best thing by Mother Earth if we do such things as expend thousands of gallons of diesel fuel (energy expense) bringing in our commodities from many thousands of miles away (a net loss in labor and non renewable fuel). With our sheep, we can aim for raising a completely forage based animal, which obviates our need to import such things as grains, and hopefully, soil amendments. But most of us, myself in particular, don't have soil right now that can truly meet all the needs of the grass which nourishes our animals (and ultimately ourselves!). We are forced to supplement while we are in transition. While we build our soil, we can build our awareness of all the factors involved in bringing nutrition and robust natural health to our animals. Aiming to be an organic producer is a great step toward building our relationship with our soil and animals. Studying managed grazing and the life cycles of the soil, grasses and forbs helps us begin to understand how to create fertility. Learning about holistic approaches to agriculture such as Biodynamics, brings us closer to our spiritual connectedness to the earth and the universe.

We have the sheep. We have the earth. We have the love of watching renewed life and the cycles of nature. If we develop our kinship with the soil, the grasses and forbs and the vast universe beneath our feet, we become so much more a part of the cycle. We will begin to give back, and in return receive more than we could possibly imagine.

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Copper Toxicity

By Susan Schoenian

University of Maryland Cooperative Extension

Recently, I visited a sheep farm where copper (Cu) toxicity was suspected. Several lambs appeared lethargic and anemic. The producer had purchased feeder lambs from a farm that had been feeding poultry litter (manure).

Sheep are unique in that they accumulate copper in the liver more readily than other farm animals. As a result, they are very susceptible to Cu toxicity (poisoning). Mature ewes of British breed origin appear to be the most vulnerable and there is evidence to suggest that Finn Sheep and Texels also have a tendency to accumulate more Cu in the liver than other breeds.

Copper is essential for life. It is required for normal iron metabolism, synthesis of elastin and collagen, melanin production and integrity of the central nervous system. It is essential in keratin (wool) production. More recently, it has been shown that copper is one of the key trace minerals required for an effective immune response. Signs of deficiency include anemia, brittle or fragile bones, loss of hair or wool pigmentation and poor wool growth. In sheep, stringy wool and "swayback" are commonly reported.

Generally, sheep require about 5 ppm (parts per million or mg/kg) of Cu in their total diet. Toxicity can occur at levels above 25 ppm. However, dietary molybdenum (Mo) levels also affect copper requirements, as Mo forms an insoluble complex with Cu to prevent copper absorption. If molybdenum levels are low (less than 1 ppm), sheep are more susceptible to Cu toxicity. If Mo intakes exceed 10 ppm, Cu deficiency may occur on diets that would normally be adequate. Sulfur (S) further complicates the Cu:Mo relationship by binding with the Mo.

Copper toxicity in sheep usually results from the accumulation of excess Cu in the liver over a period of a few weeks to more than a year with no clinical signs, followed by a sudden release of liver Cu stores to cause toxicity (rapid breakdown of red blood cells). In these situations, chronic Cu poisoning may result from excessive Cu intakes or from low intakes of Mo, S, zinc, calcium or following liver damage. Stresses, such as weather, environment, poor nutrition, transportation and handling, can also cause the liver cells to die and release the stored copper into the bloodstream.

Affected sheep are lethargic and anemic. They may grind their teeth incessantly and experience extreme thirst. Membranes are very pale and may appear yellow, as jaundice sets in. Urine is a bloody color. Death usually occurs 1 to 2 days after the onset of clinical symptoms. At post-mortem, tissues are pale to dark yellow and the kidneys are a very dark color.

In contrast, cattle require about 10 ppm of Cu in their diet and can tolerate Cu levels ten times higher than sheep. Non-ruminants, such as pigs and chickens, tolerate even higher levels of Cu. Growing pigs are often fed 100 to 250 ppm to improve performance. According to the Salt Institute, the toxic level of Cu in the diet of chickens ranges from 250 to 800 ppm.

Thus, due to species differences, it is necessary to purchase grain rations or mineral premixes which have been specifically formulated for sheep. It is recommended that sheep NOT be fed poultry litter or other waste products which contain high levels of copper. In addition, there have been instances where high levels of Cu have been traced to the fertilization of pasture with pig manure.

If and when copper toxicity is suspected, the diagnosis needs to be confirmed by a veterinarian or diagnostic laboratory. Sources of copper need to be promptly identified. It is important to know the Cu and Mo status of all feeds and forages being fed. Grains are lower in copper than forages. Most forages will contain copper at

levels equal to or above the NRC requirement for ruminants; however, as plants mature, the bio-availability of the copper decreases. Errors in feed mixing should also be considered as a possible source of excess copper. Water should not be overlooked as a source.

Although prevention is much preferred, there are times when treatment is warranted to prevent further losses. The most common treatment is to give a drench daily containing 50 to 100 mg of ammonium molybdate and 0.5 to 1.0g of sodium sulfate.

Though more data is needed, observations suggest that goats are more tolerant of copper than sheep. In copper load studies conducted in Germany, goats consumed more copper and retained 6 to 9 times less in their livers than their trial lamb mates, indicating differences in utilization and resistance to toxicity between the species. "Dairy Goat Information of the Serious Kind," an excellent Internet source (www.saanendoah.com/goatss.html) recommends that goats NOT be fed minerals labeled for sheep or sheep AND goats, without some other form of copper supplementation. Minerals formulated for cattle or horses usually contain adequate levels of copper and can be fed to goats. Copper boluses can be used (resized for goats) when goats, and/or cattle share the same pasture or pen with sheep.

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Composting Dead Sheep

By David L. Greene

County Extension Director (retired)

University of Maryland Cooperative Extension

Since renderers no longer pick up and dispose of sheep, producers have few options in the disposal of sheep and sheep products. Because of the concerns over groundwater pollution, burying sheep is not practical or recommended in most cases. Incineration is the best alternative, but is very costly, therefore not very practical for small and mid-size sheep producers.



Composting is a recycling process where bacteria and fungi decompose organic material in an aerobic (oxygen present) environment. Organic wastes, in this case dead sheep, are transformed by bacteria into a soil-like material similar to humus.

The composting process generally occurs in two stages: primary and secondary. During the primary stage, a higher rate of biological activity results in rapid composting and higher temperatures in the bin. Conversely, the secondary stage has lower biological activity resulting in lower temperatures.

In composting, the material mix is very important. The mix requires the proper balance of carbon and nitrogen. When this balance occurs along with adequate levels of air and water, the composting process results in nearly complete disposal of dead sheep with little odor and run-off. A carbon to nitrogen ratio of 25 to 1 is best, with the sheep supplying most of the nitrogen.

The concentration of oxygen in the mixture is very important. Air is trapped in the material used for composting. As the bacteria multiply, oxygen is used up and additional oxygen must be re-supplied for the composting process to be successful. Turning or mixing the pile after the process slows down will add oxygen and help it to restart the composting process.

The carbon source is also very important in allowing air penetration and holding moisture in the pile. Green (undried) sawdust has been the carbon source of choice in large animal composting. Wood chips will work also, but more attention must be given to monitoring the pile to be certain the correct moisture is present, as chips tend to dry out faster than sawdust. To encourage bacterial growth and rapid composting, the mixture must be 50-60 percent moisture. If a handful feels moist, but no water can be squeezed from it, the mixture is probably okay.

Monitoring the process with a three foot composting thermometer (which can be purchased in most garden

supply stores) will show if the pile is heating up properly. When the temperature of the pile declines below 100 F, adding water and stirring to provide oxygen should cause the pile to heat up again. When temperatures remain above 130 F for three consecutive days, disease-causing pathogens within the pile will be destroyed.

After the composting process has completed, usually in 6-8 weeks for active composting and 15 to 20 weeks for inactive, the material can be spread over pastures and crop fields. A good time to clean out the composter is when the manure is hauled from the barn. A manure spreader does a good job of breaking up some of the larger bones that may not be fully decomposed.

How to Get started

Usually only one bin will be needed for most flocks under 25 to 30 ewes. Bins should be at least 6 square feet and possibly 8 square feet for larger breeds. Do not build bins larger than necessary since larger bins require more carbon material (sawdust, chips, manure etc.). The boards on the sides of the bin should have gaps of ½ to ¾ inches for proper airflow. Bins should be located close to buildings and a water source, but not in direct contact with the flock. A roof over the bins is recommended, but is not necessary if a tarp can be used during periods of excessive rainfall.

Larger flocks will require two bins. Dead lambs, afterbirth, or material returned from the butchering process can all be composted by this method as well.

Begin with at least 1 foot of sawdust in the bin before placing in the dead animal. Situate the carcass so that at least a foot of carbon material (sawdust in this case) is between the animal and the bin sides. Cover the carcass with one and a half feet of material and monitor every few days. Recent research has indicated that a 120 lb. carcass will require about 12 cubic feet of sawdust.

Personal experience over the last four years has shown this process works well, is a labor saver, is low in cost, has little odor, does not promote the growth of flies or other annoying insects, and is environmentally friendly.

For more information, Contact NRAES (www.nraes.org or 607/255-7654) to purchase "Field Guide to On-Farm Composting" for \$14.

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Volunteers Needed!

BBSAI is looking for members who would like to get more involved in their association. The best way for our association to grow is for members to help make our foundation stronger and to promote the American Blackbelly and the Barbados Blackbelly sheep. If you have time to volunteer please contact BBSAI at info@blackbellysheep.org. Please include in your email a brief explanation of the area you would like to volunteer and why you want to volunteer.

In addition, several board positions will be open for the June 2005 elections. Joining a committee now is a great way to see if a board position is right for you. Below are some of the areas in which volunteers are needed for research. In some areas, volunteers can work independently and/or on committees.

- Help develop an outreach program that targets 4-H and FFA youth and includes the creation of a grant funding program. Interview 4-H leaders, develop mailing lists, write letters, interview program participants, help select grant recipients, and conduct follow-up interviews with recipients after completion of the program.
- Assist in revising the BBSAI brochure to better represent the American Blackbelly.
- Research how other sheep associations manage their registry. This research will help determine which direction our association needs to proficiently improve the current registry.

- Help research and develop the American Blackbelly Breed Standards.
- Assist in the research to determine if changes are needed for the Barbados Blackbelly Breed Standards. Research the impact of progeny testing as a requirement for registration. This research will help us to determine if progeny testing is needed for any of our breeds before registry.
- Help convert several hundred lamb recipes to the format used in the BBSAI Cookbook Volume 2.
- Help to edit and proof documents such as articles for the newsletter, the second volume of the BBSAI Cookbook, the revised BBSAI brochure and the breed standard for the American Blackbelly and Barbados Blackbelly sheep and more.
- Help redesign the BBSAI Web site
- Help evaluate new vendors and software to manage the BBSAI registry database

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Committee Forming to Develop American Blackbelly Breed Standards

The BBSAI recognizes the need to develop a formal breed standard for the American Blackbelly sheep. Currently, American Blackbelly sheep that conform to Barbados Blackbelly breed standards are allowed to be registered, the primary difference being the presence of horns on American Blackbelly rams. The BBSAI would like to form an ad hoc committee to develop formal breed standards for American Blackbelly sheep.

We are looking for committee members who are knowledgeable about the American Blackbelly breed and who can bring to the Committee a broad perspective regarding desirable traits and whose goal is to improve the breed. Committee members would be expected to communicate with each other via email and via occasional telephone conferences for which they would pay their own long-distance charges.

If you would be interested in participating on such a committee, please contact the BBSAI at info@blackbellysheep.org. Include in your email a brief explanation of your involvement in American Blackbelly sheep and why you want to help develop the breed's standards.

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Share Your Knowledge & Experience!

BBSAI News would like to publish articles from members about their American Blackbelly and/or Barbados Blackbelly sheep. A REWARD of two free CERTIFICATES OF REGISTRY from the Barbados Blackbelly Sheep Association International is given for every published article that you send. These REWARDS are good for up to one full year from the date that your article is published.

The subject matter in the article must be between 400 and 600 words about members' experiences with American Blackbelly and Barbados Blackbelly sheep. We will not accept articles from previously published sources without written permission from the copyright holder. The President and Editor will have final approval of each article that is submitted.

Below are some suggestions that might help you with your article. You are not limited to these suggestions. If you have another suggestion for an article please contact James Harper at jharper53@erols.com

1. List the top five things that you found most useful to know when you first got involved in raising sheep, and explain how knowing each of these helped you.
2. Discuss the five tools or pieces of equipment that you have found to be most useful in your sheep operation.

3. List five ways that caring for Barbados Blackbelly sheep differs from caring for woolie breeds of sheep.
4. Describe your pasture operation or barn setup or fencing system and explain why it works, and doesn't work, for you.
5. Describe two books that you have read about raising sheep and explain why they were, or were not, helpful to your operation.
6. Describe how you find customers to purchase your lambs or freezer meat.

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Small Ruminant Sustainability Check Sheet

Heightened interest has developed in sheep and goats for meat, dairy products and their use in brush and weed control. ATTRA (Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas) has developed a Small Ruminant Sustainability Check Sheet. This and several other new publications were funded by the Southern Region SARE Professional Development Program. To view this and other valuable resources visit (<http://attra.ncat.org/livestock.html>)

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Cast Your Vote on the Lamb Checkoff

USDA regarding the upcoming vote about whether or not to continue paying a tax on butchered sheep. The tax is used to finance the Lamb Checkoff Program. As sheep producers, you have the right to vote in this election. There are a lot of pros and cons to this issue, but in a nutshell,

Pro: The money raised helps increase the market for lamb and lamb products.

Con: You pay about \$.80 for every sheep you take to a slaughterhouse. The Department of Agriculture uses this money to promote wool sheep and wool products--in our government's eyes, hair sheep do not exist. A similar checkoff program for beef was found to be unconstitutional in 2002.

Voting is simple. Beginning Jan 31, you can download a ballot from <http://www.ams.usda.gov/lsg/mpb/rp-lamb.htm> (the ballot is not posted there yet). You complete the form and mail, fax, or personally deliver the ballot to your local FSA (Farm Services Agency).

Please mark your calendars and take just a few moments to cast your vote.

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Thank you for being a loyal BBSAI member. We value your membership and will continue to strive to be a good resource for you. Please let us know how we are doing and share with us any ideas you may have about what the BBSAI can do for you.

[Send an Email to the Association](#)

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