



Greeting BBSAI Members!

Now that the holidays are past and we are entering the depths of winter, some of us are anticipating the arrival of the next generation of lambs! Between that, and the prospect of spring, we hope that your dark winter days will be brightened, and that your lambs are strong, healthy and everything you hoped for!

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/2006Jan/BBSAI2006Jan.htm>

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Barbados Blackbelly Sheep Association International Newsletter
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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

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President's Message

As 2006 is now under way, I would like to announce our new slate of directors. They are as follows: Susan Smith, Frank Smith, Barb Lee, and Dianna Exner. Mary Swindell is taking over for Mark Fleming as our new secretary/treasurer and I am serving the last year of my term as president. I am looking forward to working with all of the new directors in the upcoming year. They are all very talented and have a wealth of knowledge that they are bringing to the table in an effort to help promote our wonderful breeds of sheep and to guide our association in a forward path. I congratulate each of them for being elected by the members of the BBSAI to serve as directors.

Joshua B. Weimer
President, BBSAI

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A Big Thank You to Board Members Carol Elkins and Mark Fleming!

The BBSAI Board and BBSAI membership wish to express our heartfelt thanks and gratitude to outgoing Board members Carol Elkins and Mark Fleming for their dedication and hard work over the last few years.

Carol Elkins has served as webmistress for the BBSAI for several years, and continues to do so. She has also served on the Board of Directors from 1999 through 2005, and has been responsible for many of the huge steps forward in promoting American Blackbelly and Barbados Blackbelly sheep throughout the country, speaking at seminars, writing professional papers, and forwarding the cause of these lovely breeds.

Mark Fleming has served as secretary/treasurer and registrar for the BBSAI from 2002 through 2005, and has tirelessly worked behind the scenes to maintain our registry database and develop continuous updates and improvements in our operating papers and informational systems, to provide information and registry services to our members, and to promote our American Blackbelly and Barbados Blackbelly sheep to the outside world.

We have been very fortunate as an Association to have had the talents of both Carol and Mark on the BBSAI Board. We will greatly miss their presence on the Board, including the thoughtful ways in which they have both steered this Association during their years of service. Thank you Carol and Mark, for your dedication and service. We at the BBSAI owe a great deal to you both, and we will always be grateful!

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Looking for These Lifetime Members!

The BBSAI Board needs your help in locating the following lifetime BBSAI members, for whom we do not have current addresses. If you know any of these people, please ask them to get in touch with any BBSAI Board member, so that we can update their address and send them the BBSAI Newsletter. We appreciate your help!

John Gann
Butch and Vicki Smallwood
Judy McCray

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The Kung Fu Ewe

by Susan Smith
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Sheep, according to Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary are: 1. any numerous ruminant mammals (genus Ovis) related to the goats but stockier and lacking a beard in the male: one O. aries) long domesticated for its flesh, wool, and other products 2. a: a timid defenseless creature b: a silly bashful fellow 3. leather prepared from the skins of sheep: sheepskin.

Now, I would never dispute the knowledge of such a man as Mr. Webster, but I will take issue with one part of his "sheep" description. That being that sheep are a "timid defenseless creature."

When we first got into Blackbelly sheep I named them all. One of my favorites was an older ewe I named Kess. Actually my son gave me the name for her. Kess was a character from the TV program, "Star Trek Voyager." This character was a member of the Okampa species, a mild- mannered peaceful race of aliens with whom the Starship Voyager found itself involved.

Well anyway, with that out of the way, back to Kess. She was a big girl and was more woolly than a purebred Blackbelly should be but I thought she was cool looking and remained my favorite. Then came the day her true personality reared its ugly head and changed my mind about her forever. She dropped in points in the "favorite poll;" in fact she bottomed right out of it.

My husband and I started out on one really beautiful Saturday morning to do foot trims on our nearly perfect Blackbelly sheep. I know how to do the foot trimming and my husband being a tall (six-foot-four) and muscular man was going to help me by holding these sheep.

We got the ewes into the smaller paddock where we were able to grab them one by one. My husband did me proud. He wrestled those ewes right onto their backside and held them so I could trim their feet. Everything was proceeding so nicely and we were even ahead of the time I thought it would take to do these 12 ewes. We were laughing and talking about our future raising sheep and how smoothly the day was going and that we may even be done in time to go out for lunch after this was done.

We let Molly go, stood up and stretched our back muscles before taking on the next ewe. Looking at the 3 ewes left in the paddock, I noted that Kess was acting strangely. She had this wild look in her eye that none of the other ewes expressed. Well sure they were difficult to catch, but once on their butts they were a piece of cake to trim. But I was not getting a good feeling that this ewe was going to be easy. I said nothing to my husband in fear that I would lose my help. He is not big on "crazy-acting" animals, something I have never understood. Where is the adventure in that?

I made the decision that we would do Kess next. Maybe she was just anxious to get out of there and back to the flock. I would oblige her by doing her feet now.

You may want to close your eyes for this next part. We started for Kess. When we got within about four feet of her, she went airborne. Before I could say to my husband, "Get out of the way," Kess bounced off his chest with all four feet, hit the ground, bounced up and cleared a five-foot fence and was back in with the rest of the flock. I stood there looking between the fence and my groaning husband on the ground in total disbelief of what had just happened.

My husband limped to the house growling and wincing in pain, Kess did not get her feet done, and I did not get taken out to lunch. All I got for the next week was "your sheep" this or "your sheep" that. I assumed we were no longer a team in this sheep-

raising adventure.

What happened to Kess, you are wondering? I still loved that ewe; of course, I am not the one that got Kung Fu'd. She was sold this last Spring to a man in another state far, far away. Another galaxy would be too close as far as my husband is concerned. The gentlemen was told this story and took her anyway, saying he would be careful around her.

Do I miss Kess? I sure do, but out of respect for my husband and the pain she caused him, I was willing to sell her. So as far as my husband is concerned it is good riddance to a really rotten ewe, but you know what? I have her daughter and he doesn't know it. Oh, by the way her name is Okampa.

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Calendar of Blackbelly Events

If you know of any upcoming events in which Barbado or Barbados Blackbelly Sheep are participating, e-mail lee@ccwebster.net.

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Pasture Parasite Preparedness!

Ten Questions to Test Your Knowledge
of the Role of Pasture Management in Parasite Control

By Barb Lee

Just like so many other matters of health and wellness, parasite control is best dealt with by preventing over-infection in the first place, rather than chasing after a runaway disease with toxic chemical rescue. And just as the health of the sheep is the health of the grass is the health of the soil, parasite populations will respond to pasture and soil management practices either positively or negatively, depending on the farmer's approach.

This list of questions and answers is only meant as a teaser, an invitation to discover the world of the living soil and how raising sheep in harmony with the soil and the pasture can yield better health for our sheep and in turn, for us.

If the possibilities of this simple list intrigue you, there is no limit to the amazing things you can discover when you begin to research "grass farming!"

Question #1: How does overgrazing (removing too much grass) affect my sheep's susceptibility to parasite infestation?

Answer: Parasite larvae have a limited ability to climb up a grass leaf, where it will be ingested by a ruminant animal. 80% of parasites reside in the first 2" of grass above the soil. Keeping a "residual" (grass height) of 4" in the pasture sward will lower the probability of infection.

Question #2: How long do parasites live on pasture?

Answer: Longer than once was believed. Many larvae survive through winter and longer. Some sources say a minimum of 3 years' rest (no grazing by one species) to be required before a pasture can be considered "clean!"

Question #3: Does "multi-species grazing" really help prevent parasite infestation?

Answer: Sheep, goats and llamas share the same parasites. Both sheep and cattle carry "haemonchus contortus," but apparently of different strains. Alternately grazing different species on a pasture can help break the parasite cycles, but is not foolproof. Study the habits of different grazing animals and see how they can be put to use in a managed grazing program, both for parasite control, and for pasture health.

Question #4: Are pregnant ewes more susceptible to parasites?

Answer: Yes. And not only that, but they shed huge numbers of "h. contortus" eggs just before lambing, thereby assuring an infected pasture for their offspring. Be sure your parasite control program addresses this problem before turning pregnant ewes out on clean pastures.

Question #5: Do earthworms help in parasite control?

Answer: Yes! An abundant colony in the soil, along with dung beetles and microbes, will make quick work of manure on the surface of the soil, thereby reducing the parasite load. Earthworms can only thrive in healthy soil. A cowpat that sits in the pasture for long periods without disappearing into a patch of dense green grass is a sure sign of poor soil activity. A thriving subsurface population of earthworms and microbes will make quick work of the manure, and enhance its fertilization capability many times over. Take care of your soil!

Question #6: How about pasture rotation for parasite control?

Answer: The concept of moving animals from pasture to pasture to diminish parasite loads is good in theory, but doesn't necessarily hold up in practice. The lifespan of certain parasites is always greater than the time required between grazing periods when optimal use of the forage is the goal. For instance, if you are grazing your animals on the "spring flush" of grass, a period of six weeks between grazing on any one paddock will greatly reduce the quality of the grass as it lignifies and becomes over mature. And as we have seen, up to three years is required to destroy some parasites!

Question #7: Does dragging, or harrowing my pastures help to control parasites?

Answer: It depends. If the pasture is going to be rested during a hot spell, dragging/harrowing may expose parasites to the sun, which may kill them. However, generally, harrowing only spreads the parasites out and makes selective grazing (avoidance of manure) impossible, and spreads the manure smell, which may (at least for cattle) lead to pasture refusal. Good management practices which distribute manure evenly over the pastures, and healthy soil with a large population of earthworms and microbes to digest the manure, are the first lines of defense.

Question #8: What is a "safe" pasture?

Answer: A "safe" pasture is one that is not necessarily free of infective larvae, but instead is low enough that parasite burdens increase slowly in susceptible sheep.

Pastures that have been harvested for hay, silage or small grain crops are generally considered safe.

Pastures that have been grazed by cattle or horses for at least a year (with no sheep) are considered safe.

Question #9: How does a sheep's grazing habits contribute to its susceptibility to parasite infestation?

Answer: Sheep like to graze close to the ground, in the 2-4" above-ground range. As we have seen, most parasites reside in the first 2" of grass above the soil surface. In

addition, the pelleted manure that sheep create make it very difficult for the sheep to avoid its own manure, so the likelihood of re-infection is high. Sheep also apparently do not avoid grass in close proximity to manure, as do cattle.

Question #10: How about the pasture plants themselves? Do any forage plants contribute to lower parasite infection?

Answer: Pastures that are grass dominant (few legumes) tend to be more infective than pastures rich in legumes (alfalfa and birdsfoot trefoil). The reason for this is apparently because of higher tannins in the legumes. And how about this for a coincidence? Legumes will not thrive in poor soil conditions! It all comes around to increasing the health of the soil!

These questions and answers are just a small taste of the wonderfully complex relationship between our sheep, the grass and soil upon which they depend for their health.

I would encourage you to explore "grass farming" more deeply, to learn more about positively affecting the health of your animals naturally, as well as your own, by caring for the soil first.

Information resources, for this article and grass farming in general:

Article: Control of Internal Parasites in Sheep

Authors: W. Dee Whittier, Extension Veterinarian; Anne Zajac, Extension Parasitologist; and Steven H. Umberger, Extension Animal Scientist; Virginia Tech
Publication Number 410-027, October, 2003

Article: The Control of Internal Parasites in Cattle and Sheep

Author: Jean Duval, agr. M.Sc.

Article: On the specific distinctness of the ovine and bovine "Strains" of *Haemonchus contortus* (Rudolphi) Cobb (Nematoda: Trichostrongilidae).

Author: FHS Roberts, H Newton-Turner and M McKevev
Printed in Australian Journal of Zoology

Book: Quality Pasture, How to create it, manage it, and profit from it

Author: Allan Nation

Green Park Press, div. of Mississippi Valley Publishing Corp, Ridgeland, MS
ISBN: 0-9632460-3-8

Book: Salad Bar Beef

Author: Joel Salatin

Polyface, Inc.

ISBN: 0-9638109-1-X

Periodical: Stockman Grass Farmer

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www.stockmangrassfarmer.com

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New and Renewed Members

BBSAI New Members

Stephanie Ames, Newberg, Oregon
Candy Leisinger, Independence, Iowa
Chad Dixon, Rocky Ford, Colorado
Eldon and Cynthia Andersen, Hershey, Nebraska
Terry Wereb, Painesville, Ohio

We welcome you into our flock!

BBSAI Renewed Members

Dan and Beth Lockwood, Caldwell, Idaho
Cheryl McLaughlin, Wilcox, Arizona

Thank you for staying with our flock!

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My Experiences with Footrot

By Mary Swindell

When I first started raising sheep several years ago, I purchased a flock of 11 registered Katahdin sheep (10 ewes and a ram). Unfortunately, these sheep came in with a serious sheep foot disease which I did not recognize at first. The disease is footrot, caused by the bacterium *bacteriodes nodosus*. I paid a very high price for my ignorance, both financially as well as in terms of hard, frustrating work over one and one-half years, to rid my flock of this nasty and extremely contagious disease. I hope that by summarizing my experiences to you, many people can avoid the heartaches and burden of this disease.

Since I already had 21 Blackbelly sheep, I quarantined the new Katahdin sheep for about 30 days, and during this time observed a little limping. But I still released them from quarantine at that time and hoped for the best. An experienced sheep farmer friend saw them continue to limp, and said "Gee, I hope that is not footrot. My wife and I had that in our flock one year. We started with 35 sheep, and ended with only 5 sheep. We had to sell everything else to slaughter to get rid of the disease."

As you can guess, my Blackbelly sheep also started to limp, about a month after the Katahdins were released from quarantine. When we began to bring the sheep in to inspect their feet, the symptoms were overwhelmingly revealing. The bottoms of the feet on the limping sheep were soft and wet with angry inflamed and infected tissue between the two toes and/or inside the horny perimeter of each half of the hoof. Often the outer horny shell was separated from the soft tissue in the middle. And always, there was a foul distinctly rotten odor that came from the foot. Sometimes the sheep walked with a limp, or when both front feet were infected, certain sheep walked on their knees or kneeled to eat.

Over the next 1.5 years, the toll that this footrot epidemic took on my flock was as follows: 1) The entire Katahdin flock (11 original sheep plus 2 purebred lambs born on the premises) was sold to slaughter, and 2) Six of my 21 Blackbelly sheep were also sold to slaughter. So out of 34 total sheep, I had 15 left, which I was able to cure.

How did I manage to save the 15 sheep? Once I accepted the fact that I had a big-time problem on my hands, I decided to try to fix it. I had several thousand dollars invested in these sheep, and my stubbornness wouldn't let me pour this money down the drain. Also, it broke my heart to watch these sheep limp with increasing pain each day. So I researched everything I could locate, and found the following information:

1) Footrot is transferred from sheep to sheep via the ground that they walk on. The bacteria can also be transferred on boots, dog feet, tools (such as unsterilized hoof

shears) and even human hands or gloves. However, the bacteria cannot live for long outside the sheep foot. So fields, lots, barn floors, etc. can be clean and safe for healthy sheep to walk on after about three weeks.

2) The best program for fighting footrot is a combination program, involving a) quarantining, b) hoof trimming, c) foot bathing, d) vaccination, e) record keeping, and f) aggressive culling. Any one of these approaches can be used separately, but it will not be nearly as effective as if they are all used together.

Quarantining. As soon as you notice a sheep limping, isolate him from the rest of the flock and examine his feet. If there are signs of footrot, immediately remove him from the flock and house him separately during treatment. Do not let him back with healthy sheep until his symptoms have disappeared. Also, after using the quarantine pen, do not allow healthy sheep inside for at least 3 weeks.

Hoof Trimming. Each sheep should have regular foot inspection and hoof trimming. Visual inspection and smelling each foot for that rotten odor are both extremely important. Rather aggressive trimming is recommended. After each foot is trimmed, any foot that has questionable inflammation or damage can be locally treated with Dr. Naylor' Hoof & Heal medicine (a zinc sulfate medicine which can be squirted onto the bottoms of the feet). Be sure to sterilize hoof shears between sheep, and even between "good" and "bad" feet on the same sheep if possible.

Foot Bathing. Frequent foot bathing for at least 60 minutes per sheep is highly recommended. I bathed my sheep in foot troughs filled with zinc sulfate solution (available from Premier in 1-gallon jugs), at least once per week for the entire time I had this problem in my flock. I built a special footbath chute for the sheep, which contained 3 foot troughs end-to-end. I could fit a group of four adult sheep into the foot bath chute at a time, for an hour. So in four hours, I could foot bathe 16 sheep. Their feet would soak up this toughening, drying solution and the infection would disappear. The walls were 4 feet high treated plywood, and the chute was about 19 inches wide, with cattle panel windows on the gates at both ends.

Vaccination. Each sheep should also be vaccinated against footrot, using FOOTVAX 10-Strain bacterin. You should vaccinate your entire flock if you have a footrot outbreak, regardless of whether they are currently having symptoms. The FOOTVAX vaccine is very expensive (almost \$100.00 per bottle) but it is an excellent help as a preventative, and will also help cure infected sheep with symptoms. It will shorten your flock recovery time and may save lives due to non-recurrence of the disease and a difference in your final culling decisions. There are two injections required (an initial dose and a follow up dose about 6 weeks later). Note: There is another footrot vaccine called VOLAR, which I used prior to the FOOTVAX. The VOLAR is only good for 3 strains of footrot, and I found that it was not useful at all in my flock.

Record Keeping. I kept a daily notebook record of which sheep I treated, current symptoms, type of treatment, and whether they were improving. I identified which foot/feet had the problem(s) (i.e., FL, FR, BL, and BR). I transferred this information into a chart, which had my whole flock by number down the left side, and the days of the month across the top. This chart helped me eyeball any recurrences of symptoms over the months, and it was a valuable tool for my culling decisions.

Culling. Some sheep were simply more resistant to this disease than others. Some came up with symptoms over and over, despite my efforts. Some would be cured in one foot and later have a raging problem in a different foot. When a sheep had been "cured" for some length of time (6 or 12 weeks, for instance), and then would develop symptoms again, that sheep would be a candidate for culling. I would of course work hard to cure that sheep the second time. But the third time the sheep showed symptoms, he had to go on the "cull list". Those "cull list" sheep would be loaded in the trailer and taken to market. My way of looking at this was that the cull sheep were 1) not able to be healed themselves, and 2) they were also increasing the chances of

re-infecting my other sheep, just because they were still on the premises.

Conclusions and Advice. All the veterinarian advice which I have read stresses that you must use a multi-faceted approach to treating footrot. The money spent on the 3 foot troughs and the footbath chute was the best investment I have ever made. The vaccination is essential and will cut your healing time in half. Of course the trimming, record keeping and eventual culling decisions are extremely important. Please remember that you cannot save every sheep. Some sheep will succumb to the recurrence of this disease, and you must think instead of the good of your flock as a whole.

To safeguard against future problems, remember that diseases may be transmitted in on the boots of farmers with infected flocks. Ask visitors to wear disposable boot covers when they enter your livestock areas. Anyone who knows about footrot will understand, and will not be offended.

It is equally important to be ethical in representing your flocks to others. This is especially true since many of us are essentially selling and buying rare breed genetics as we raise our Barbados Blackbelly and American Blackbelly sheep. When you sell sheep, if you have a problem with footrot or foot scald (a milder version), or if you even suspect a problem, then PLEASE be forthcoming about letting buyers know the history of problems or suspected problems in your flock. Give the buyers enough information so that they can decide whether to take those risks.

But my most important advice to everyone is: Please be careful when you select sheep for purchase. Inspect the stock before you take it home with you, and ask a lot of questions from the seller. Also, do your research before you go to the premises to buy – That is, ask other breeders about the management practices and livestock health of the breeder you intend to buy from.. Remember, this disease is extremely contagious, and can bring your entire livestock operation to its knees, literally. I wish all of you good luck with your flocks, and hope that all of your sheep may continue to have excellent health, and strong feet and hooves.

Mary Swindell raises Barbados Blackbelly sheep in southern Illinois. Her flock currently numbers 53 sheep, all with disease-free, healthy feet.

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Highlights of BBSAI Board Meeting of January 11, 2006

The BBSAI Board meeting was held on January 11, 2006 by telephone conference. The meeting was conducted by BBSAI president Josh Weimer. Our Board of Directors transacted the following business:

- 1) Treasurer's report. The BBSAI bank account has been successfully moved to the care of incoming secretary/treasurer Mary Swindell. The balances are fully reconciled and the BBSAI has a current balance on January 11, 2005 of \$3,650.32.
- 2) Membership report. The BBSAI has recently received 3 new memberships, for Chad Dixon, from Rocky Ford, Colorado; Terry Wereb from Painesville, Ohio; and Eldon & Cynthia Andersen from Hershey, Nebraska. The BBSAI now has a total of 120 members.
- 3) Registry report. There have been 3 new sheep registrations and 3 sheep ownership transfers processed during the past month. The BBSAI now has a total of 1,003 registered sheep in our registry.
- 4) Fundraising report. In addition to our income from memberships and sheep registrations, the BBSAI continues to receive income from our BBSAI CafePress gift

shop (a portion of all BBSAI products purchased on this website comes to the BBSAI as income). The BBSAI CafePress gift shop is accessible through the BBSAI website home page.

5) BBSAI Web Site. The BBSAI website will continue to be maintained by webmistress Carol Elkins during 2006. The BBSAI web site address is <http://www.blackbellysheep.org/>.

6) BBSAI Newsletter. The BBSAI newsletter will continue to be edited and published by board member Barb Lee during 2006. The newsletter will continue to be sent to members via e-mail on a quarterly basis (January, April, July, and October). Members who wish to receive a paper copy may opt to pay \$10.00 per year to receive this same newsletter through regular mail.

7) New Business. The BBSAI would like to increase communication with our membership. Various ways to offer better communication were discussed, including 1) letters to the editor in the Newsletter, and 2) a BBSAI e-mail list serve which members can join if desired. Board member Susan Smith has offered to research these outreach possibilities and report to the Board.

Submitted by Mary Swindell

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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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