Getting Started with Rare Breeds

Have you been thinking about joining ALBC’s conservation efforts by getting some of your own rare breeds? Perhaps you already have animals but are considering adding a new breed or species to your farm or ranch. The idea seems simple enough. Take a look in the Rare Breeds, Breeders and Products Directory, find someone with animals, call them up or email to arrange the purchase, then pick up or have your animals delivered, right? Although this is the general process that many people follow when choosing new animals, there are other important things to consider as well.

ALBC has defined the following criteria to consider before purchasing new animals for both first-timers and experienced farmers alike.

1. Consider your long range plan:

What do you want to do with your animals? Do you want them to be strictly ornamental or do you want to raise them for food, animal products, or breeding stock? If for food, would you be the sole consumer or do you plan to sell animal products to others outside your farm? What health regulations would affect the products that you plan to sell and who would be the market for those products? Would you also raise the animals for breeding stock? If so, what would you do with the stock you do not intend to breed?

2. Consider the context:

What is the context of your farm? Who are your neighbors? Is there a neighborhood association you would need to consult? Are your neighbors open to having livestock nearby? Would they be customers? Are there any codes or restrictions that currently affect what you may do on your farm? Would watershed or zoning regulations limit your land use? What predators inhabit the area? Contact your agricultural extension agent or local planning board to find out more.

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Raising Bummer Lambs on a Bottle

By Carol Elkins

The other night, I received an email from someone who found my Web site on the Internet. It said simply “We have barbados sheep and the mother had 3 babies and has kicked one of the babies out and now I have a baby and do not know what it wants or needs to drink as a substitute for the mother’s milk???” what do I do??

Sadly, this plea for help is all too common. Hopefully, this information may prevent a similar tragedy from occurring, especially to people new to raising sheep.

(soapbox) Caring for animals is a responsibility and a commitment. Regardless of which animal you choose, whether it is a puppy, rabbit, or sheep (or a human baby for that matter), you MUST learn what the animal’s needs are BEFORE you bring the animal home. If you do not take the time to do this, you are acting irresponsibly. (/soapbox) (Whew, I feel so much better!!)

Blackbelly sheep don’t need a lot of chemicals or a lot of intervention, but it is a good idea to have the following few items on hand when lambing.

1. A bag of lamb milk replacer; once opened, keep it in sealed gallon jars. A couple of bay leaves lain on top before you seal will help prevent weevils. You sometimes can buy lamb milk replacer from a feed store, but BE ALERT: do NOT buy calf milk replacer. If your feed store does not stock lamb milk replacer, you can purchase it from Pipestone Vet Supply (http://www.pipevet.com)

2. Also get a bag of colostrum replacer (Colostrx) while you’re there. Colostrum contains immunoglobulins that prevent infections; nutrients that fuel heat production and help prevent hypothermia (chilling); and growth factors. By the time you have a bottle baby on your hands, it often is too late to milk the mother for colostrum. If you can milk her, get all you can during the first 24 hours after lambing and freeze it in an icecube tray for up to a year. Trust me, you will need it later on.

3. Two Pritchard Teat (nipples). They fit nicely on a glass or plastic pop bottle.

4. I personally like giving each newborn lamb a couple squirts of Baby Strength Oral. It contains Vitamin E and is a rapid energy source for weak or starving lambs.

5. 140 cc syringe. Get a syringe that has both cc and oz units of measure so that you don’t have to do so much math. Premier (http://www.premier1supplies.com) sells these for $5.40. They are much more convenient than a 60 cc syringe.

6. Stomach tube. Connect to the 140-cc syringe to feed lambs that are too weak to nurse or suckle a bottle.

7. Digital thermometer

More about Colostrum

If you have colostrum on hand:

A 6-lb lamb born in a lambing shed that is 32 °F needs 480 cc of colostrum in the first 18 hours of life. The same lamb born outside will need a total of 570 cc.

Feed the lambs 4 to 5 times in the first 18 hours of life if the lamb is unable to suckle on a ewe. When feeding lambs with a stomach tube, give no more than 20 cc per pound of body weight. This is roughly 4 ounces per feeding in a 6 pound lamb (1 mL = 1 cc; 1 oz = 30 cc).

[The following information is taken verbatim (except where modified for smaller Blackbelly lambs) from Laura Lawson’s book, “Managing Your Ewe and Her Newborn Lambs.” It is a great book and should also be on your list of things to get.]

If no colostrum on hand, prepare a newborn milk formula

Ingredients:
- 8 oz. baby bottle with nipple
- 1 tsp butter
- 1 tsp dark Karo syrup
- Canned evaporated milk (NOT condensed milk)

Add Baby Lamb Strength Oral or Hartz liquid pet Vitamin A&D plus oral liquid Vitamin E to one daily feeding. Probios dispersible powder should also be added to one feeding unless the lamb is being given this is a paste form.

Directions: Enlarge nipple hole slightly with a hot needle.

Take the 8 oz baby bottle, put 1 tsp butter in it.

Set bottle in hot water to melt the butter.

Add 1 tsp of dark Karo syrup.

Fill the bottle with undiluted evaporated milk to the 8 oz mark. Heat until warm.

Add the Baby Lamb Strength Oral or pet Vitamin A&D plus liquid Vitamin E and Probios to the warmed milk once a day.

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Feeding Schedule and Amounts

**Milk Replacer:** After the initial colostrum feeding, lambs should receive about 15% to 20% of their body weight in milk replacer daily.

Example: 5 lb lamb × 16 oz/lb = 80 oz × 20% = 16 oz daily.

Divide the above daily amount by the number of feedings in a 24-hour period. Increase the amount as the lamb gains weight and gets older. As you do this, increase the time between feedings.

**Suggested Feeding Schedule:** For the first 24 hours of life, give the lamb colostrum. Feed it every 2 hours if possible through the first 24 hours of life. In the next 24 to 48 hours of the lamb's life, begin gradually mixing the colostrum or colostrum substitute with lamb milk replacer. By day four of the lamb's life, it should be receiving nothing but the lamb milk replacer according to the schedule listed below.

Follow the schedule listed below after the lamb is over 24 hours old:

- **Day 2 through 3:** every 3 hours
- **Day 4 through 7:** every 4 hours
- **Day 8 through 21:** every 6 hours
- **Day 21 through 35:** every 8 hours
- **Day 25 until weaning:** every 12 hours.

Don’t overload the lamb’s stomach by giving it too much milk at one time. **DOING SO WILL KILL THE LAMB.** Frequent feedings are better than big feedings.

Under NO CIRCUMSTANCES should you give the lamb cow’s milk. If you can’t get lamb milk replacer, use goat’s milk until you get lamb replacer.

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**The BBSAI wants to learn more about you**

We know you raise sheep, and we know you probably sell sheep. We already help you sell sheep via the BBSAI Classified ads on our Web site. We’d like to help you in your other sheep-related enterprises.

**What else do you do that is sheep-related?**

The BBSAI would like to provide space in its newsletter to help members advertise their services and products to other members.

- Do you make sheep jewelry?
- Do you embroider sheep patches?
- Do you build or weld sheep products?
- Do you sell guardian livestock dogs or herding dogs?
- Do you sell hay?
- Do you haul animals?
- Do you sell lamb coats?
- Do you make cheese?
- Do you draw or paint sheep?
- Did you show your sheep in a county fair? Did you win?

Email us at newsletter@blackbelly-sheep.org and let us know.
Rare Breeds

3. Inventory your resources:

While you are researching livestock species, also conduct a resource inventory of your property, personal finances, and time to determine whether you have what is necessary to raise the animals you are considering. Take note of pastures on your property, ponds (and the quality of the water in them), barns, fences, and wooded areas. Do you have what your livestock would need? What modifications would be necessary? Do you have the financial resources for the upkeep of livestock? Would you need to buy any special equipment? How much time and energy are you willing to devote to raising your animals?

4. Consider your market:

If you are raising animals for market, carefully research and analyze how you will get your animals and their products to your end-users. Animals used for meat will need to be slaughtered. Are there facilities available? How will you advertise? Who will be your target customer? How will you distribute your products? If you plan to sell breeding stock remember that not all animals are of breeding quality.

5. Decide on a species to raise:

Think about what animals appeal to you. Do you prefer large animals or small animals? Fur or feathers? If you are unfamiliar with livestock and poultry, spend some time at local fairs and farms to see which species are the most interesting and attractive to you. Become acquainted with species characteristics, husbandry needs, and production uses. Will they fit your interests, capabilities, and resources? Choosing a breed comes next. Membership in ALBC will provide conservation and breed information as well as access to breeders.

6. Consider your climate:

Much thought should be given to climate, as this is something you cannot change unless you decide to move. Some breeds are adapted to certain climates and may not be able to thrive in others. Infrastructure also ties in to weather-related considerations. Weather extremes often prompt the need for facilities like barns, sheds, or available water supply which can be crucial for successfully raising animals.

7. Consider your budget:

Another factor that needs to be addressed is the financial feasibility of owning particular animals. Although your animals will need to eat, you still need to eat too, so make sure you have the resources available to take on a new line item in your budget. If animals or products are going to be bought and sold, develop a business plan to help determine how reasonable your ambitions are. Any farm expecting to make a profit should have a completed and up-to-date business plan, regardless of farm size. Comprehensive market research can be greatly beneficial in identifying if there will be a demand for your animals and products in your area. You can also identify customer demographics and develop an effective marketing plan to promote your products.

8. Consider the time commitment:

Additionally, make sure you have time to devote to raising your animals. We all have commitments in our lives, but when acquiring new stock, we also acquire the responsibility of caring for them.

Each species and breed has certain requirements that may be different from what we are used to or have experience with. By doing your homework and thoughtfully evaluating which animals will work best for you, you can ensure that both you and your heritage breeds will live happy, healthy, and productive lives while simultaneously contributing to rare breed conservation.
My Adventure with American Blackbelly Sheep

By Ruby Troncin, McMinnville, OR

As a farmer, I'm an amateur; I will be the first to admit it. I have only been raising sheep for about four years. I started out by raising a little ewe appropriately called "Dolly." She was a Romney, Hampshire, and Suffolk cross. She is basically a commercial meat sheep, but she's white and her wool isn't too bad either.

I got into this racket for one basic reason. I had a few extra acres and need a farm deferral. In Oregon, it is all about making a profit and putting in for the deferral at the county. That's another story...

Romney sheep are a combination sheep—good for wool (hand spinners like their wool) and their meat is tasty. They are well adapted to the marshy conditions of Oregon. My husband and I began milking Dolly and we liked it. Thus we started looking around for sheep that might be better milkers.

That is when we saw the ad for American Blackbelly sheep. Their owners had been raising them for their restaurant, but were getting a divorce and moving. They were selling them for a price we couldn't pass up. And besides, the breed intrigued us. They had beautiful markings, looked more like deer, and were very agile. They also had other advantages—high tolerance to pests, out-of-season breeding, high birth rates, no shearing, stronger leather, and attractive horns.

We went to pick them up. It was a nightmare! It took us two hours running them down, and that was with the help of our two Border Collies. And the worst part of it, one of the ewes over-stretched her hamstring in one of her front legs. We were sick. We took her home and fashioned a crude splint for her and called around to the local vets. Only one vet in the area would treat a sheep. We took her right in. The vet put a proper splint on and showed us how and when to change the dressing. If she didn't get better in three weeks, she was done. She would never be able to carry a lamb.

We followed every instruction to the letter. She got better. Nine months later, she is just fine. Of course, the vet bill was 6 times what we paid for her, but these things happen. Blackbelly sheep can be delicate, especially around their legs. Lesson learned!

One month after we got our ewes we decided to add to our little Blackbelly flock; thus Benjamin arrived in a dog carrier. He was half the size of his girlfriends and just a baby. His horns were barely budding out over his ears. At three months, he was a charmer, with big brown eyes and as tame as he could be. All he wanted to do was eat. We put him in with Mary, who had hurt her leg.

She had to be confined to rest her leg, so she was lonely. She wasn't eating much. We figured they would make a great pair. He fell in love. She couldn't stand the sight of him. He strikes a much more charming figure now at 11 months and she likes him much more. Her daughter Bim likes him the best.

Poor Mary, her troubles were only beginning. A month later, when we thought she was completely on the mend, she started throwing herself on the ground with her eyes rolling in the back of her head. We thought she had some terrible disease or something. It was terrible! Then I noticed her stomach starting to distend. "Oh no," I thought, "it's the bloat." I looked in my sheep books and on Web sites. Push on the stomach, cut a hole in the stomach, force soda water down their throats. I couldn't bear to stab her in the stomach. I opted for the pushing and the soda water. It took hours of work, but eventually she calmed down and finally seemed like she wasn't going to die. I was so relieved; I went in the house and drank a beer. I'm not a drinker, but if there was a time to drink, that was it. From that time on, everyone gets bicarbonate of soda with their grain in the morning. We do not take any more chances. Everyone is fine now. We think all pregnant, although we are not quite sure when. We will let you know when the new crop comes in. We are crossing our fingers for our new mommies. Wish us good luck on our new adventure!
Ask the BBSAI

Questions sent to info@blackbellysheep.org are answered by BBSAI Registrar Mary Swindell.

Q: As soon as my lambing is done, I want to start planning for them. I would like to breed intelligently, and I'm not sure what that means. Do I want to preserve some lines separately? Do I want to outcross everything possible at this point?

A: The worst thing you can do is mix everything up together (like throwing everything into a big soup pot and stirring). That is because you have none of the original "separateness" left. That original "separateness" or different-ness, is what you want to preserve. It is the key to survival for any breed. Once you lose those separate, different genetic resources (due to mixing up the pot to the point where everything you have is exactly the same), then you lose forever the opportunity to introduce something different. For this reason, we recommend linebreeding to establish separate bloodlines that within themselves are genetically similar, but are very different from each other. That way, we always have a potential genetic resource if we need to outcross to another bloodline. And we can supply other breeders with these separate bloodlines which are very different from each other.

The degree to which each bloodline is genetically similar to itself is not a bad thing—in fact most breeds can tolerate a large amount of inbreeding in their genetics and still maintain vigor. If there is evidence of too much inbreeding (if the inbreeding coefficient is too high), certain lines may suffer from what is called "inbreeding depression" where the lambs are not as large or as vigorous as perhaps they should be. But it takes a long time to get to that point, so not to worry. We humans have placed a high level of taboo on "marrying your cousin" but in the animal world it takes many generations of inbreeding to get to a point where this is a problem.

Q: I can tell the differences in body type and head shape, but I don't know an outstanding sheep from a good one. I know that conformation is not everything, nor is size. What traits should I breed for?

A: For any rare and endangered breed, the preservation of a wide breadth of typy, good quality genetics is the most important thing. This is true, even if all the genetic blood types are not as ideal as a particular breeder thinks they should be. If bloodline A has a small white tip on its tail, and there are no more bloodline A sheep available anywhere, it doesn't make sense to throw out bloodline A. You might need it someday to revive a dying breed, which could be becoming extinct through massive inbreeding programs. So we try to preserve as much genetic breadth as possible.

Meanwhile, there are a whole list of successful selective breeding attributes to look for: good size, smooth, rich coats, excellent color markings, smooth heads, good mothering, good long top lines, excellent stout legs, good front and back ends, resistance to parasites, good temperament, and so on. Be sure to read the Barbados Blackbelly Breed Standards thoroughly and commit the basics to memory when you are thinking about these things.

Q: We raise American Blackbelly. If our next ram is a Barbados Blackbelly instead of American Blackbelly, would we then be able to register lambs as American Blackbelly? Also, we have a ewe that is half Blackbelly and half mouflon. Her lamb from a registered American Blackbelly ram looks completely like an American Blackbelly. Would this lamb be eligible for registration?

A: The BBSAI does not register crosses between American Blackbelly, Barbados Blackbelly, or any other breed of sheep. The main issue here is the polledness which would dilute the magnificent horns on the rams, for which the AB breed was developed. In Texas and Oklahoma for example, there are many unregisterable crosses, known locally as "barbado" sheep. Many of the males have little horns of about 5 inches, while some have only scurs. This has resulted from indiscriminate breeding through several generations. The BBSAI came into existence in the mid-1990s for the purpose of protecting the original sheep as they first came to the United States from Barbados (in the case of the BB sheep), or as they were first developed for the game-ranch market in the southwest USA (in the case of the AB sheep). So while the BBSAI has no issues or problems with the continual commercial breeding of "barbado" sheep, we try our best to protect the standardized AB and BB breeds.

Because the American Blackbelly registry is still an open registry (meaning that AB sheep can be registered even though their parents are unregistered or unknown, as long as the sheep being registered meets all the AB breed standards), then yes, technically

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you may register a sheep which looks just like an American Blackbelly sheep as an American Blackbelly, even though you know that it is half-mouflon. However (and this is a pretty big "however") there are a few important considerations, so I will just list them below for you to think about.

1. The purebred quality of both the AB registry and the BB registry are only as good as the purebred quality of sheep which make up the registry. Especially as we bring in new animals to the still-open AB registry, it is important for our breeder members to keep in mind that a 50% mouflon animal is going to bring in 50% mouflon characteristics down the line, even if she doesn’t actually display many or any of the mouflon characteristics herself. The American Blackbelly breed was started in the 1970s through crossing original BB sheep with mouflon, rambouillet and possibly other breeds. It has already gone through 40 years of shaky attempts to standardize the breed while some commercially-oriented breeders continued to outcross with other breeds in order to achieve their personal marketing goals (bigger carcass, etc.). As a result, the AB breed is already diluted with mouflon, rambouillet, and perhaps other woolly and hair breeds. If this AB breed is to survive and become more firmly standardized in its phenotypical as well as hidden attributes of genetic excellence, we breeders must act with integrity and conscientiousness. We may be going in the wrong direction if we deliberately allow a 50% mouflon cross to be registered and to therefore further dilute the gene pool of AB animals which we are still trying to stabilize.

2. Even if a 50% mouflon and 50% AB cross ewe displays all the phenotypical (visible) attributes of the AB breed, the question will always be: Will she breed true in future generations? Will her offspring, and THEIR offspring revert back to the Mouflon characteristics? This cannot be known in advance, and sometimes the answers to this question cannot be found for many months or even years. Meanwhile, there may have been many lambs born to this crossbred ewe which in turn will continue to dilute the AB registry with mouflon characteristics. Conscientious breeders need to consider what they are inserting into this rare and precious gene pool of registered AB stock.

3. As the offspring of a known crossed sheep are sold as “registered AB animals” for breeding stock, they in turn become possible foundation animals for other breeders. Down the line, we find that what was once observed as favorable phenotypical or hidden genetic attributes of the AB breed, can no longer be observed in the flocks of buyers. For instance, parasite resistance may be down, prolificacy may be reduced, and phenotypically, those crisp deep black facial bars, solid black underbelly, and deep rich brown coat without the “mouflon saddle” may not be present anymore in future offspring. This is a sign that the AB-breed, so close to being established as a fully standardized breed, has once again fallen into a state of obscurity due to the large percentage of other breeds being crossed in and registered as purebred AB stock. We certainly do not wish to see a time in the future when American Blackbelly breeders lament that the “beautiful, strong and hardy American Blackbelly breed that we saw in the early 2000s are no longer in existence.”

4. For the three reasons above, some members of the BBSAI have begun to think it is time to close the AB registry to protect that breed, just as the BB registry was closed to protect the BB breed in 2004. This concept is in the beginning stages of consideration.

So in conclusion, I suggest that you think through these issues and make your decision accordingly. We have no AB registry limitation at the present time which would keep you from registering your known 50% mouflon cross lamb, so it is up to you.

However, there is one more alternative which I might suggest to you for this cross sheep. You could “track” her instead of registering her. In your tracking application, there is a space provided for you to indicate why she is being tracked instead of registered. You would simply put that she is 50% mouflon. Tracking is the same price as registering ($5.00 per sheep) and you will receive a nice certificate and seal, similar to the registration certificate. Tracking also allows the sheep to be entered into the registry database (as a tracked animal), so that the multi-generation pedigrees of all her offspring will include her name and number. This is an important benefit to the AB breed and to you as a breeder, since the generational “link” will not be lost. It may be that all her offspring, and their offspring, will be registerable and that you will decide to register all of them as AB sheep. That would be acceptable, and would allow these future offspring to be registered even if the AB registry becomes closed in the future. So you may decide that
Ask the BBSAI

tracking is truly the best alternative in this case.

The most important thing I can offer to BBSAI members is food for thought so that you can take action as a responsible breeder in the way that you see best. The BBSAI is only as strong as its members who work together to protect the AB and BB breeds!

New BBSAI Members

Eileen and Bill Breedlove  Lebanon, OR
Thad Buckler  Evansburg, AB
John Daughtrey  Yakima, WA
Eileen and Jared McNeely  Kenton, OH
Joy Preiser  Zephyrchills, FL
Anna Querbach  Cranbrook, BC

BBSAI Board Votes

01/25/2012  Vote to retain Mark Fleming as President; Carol Elkins as Secretary; Stephanie Parrish as Treasurer. (4 yes, 0 no) Passed.

01/25/2012  Vote to elect Patrick Kahn as vice president. (4 yes, 0 no) Passed.

03/14/2012  Vote to purchase Lamb Lover Cookbooks from our Cafe-Press store for resale at events such as the Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival and county/state fairs (4 yes, 0 no) Passed.

Send the BBSAI your farm’s business card that features blackbelly sheep and we’ll include it in a newsletter (space permitting). Mail to 808 30th Lane, Pueblo, CO, or email newsletter@blackbellysheep.org

BBSAI annual memberships will expire on June 30, 2012. Please complete the Membership Renewal Form included with this newsletter and mail it back to the BBSAI to preserve your membership status for the coming year.

Lifetime members must also complete the Membership Renewal Form.

If you complete the Membership Renewal Form now, we won’t need to send you any more renewal notices in the mail. That saves on postage. The money we save on postage is spent on advertising to promote your sheep. Everyone wins if you return your Membership Renewal Form now instead of waiting until the last minute.
Barbados Blackbelly Sheep Association International

Membership Renewal

ALL BBSAI memberships expire on June 30.
To maintain your active membership status, please complete this form.

Annual Membership Renewal

☐ I wish to renew my annual membership in the Barbados Blackbelly Sheep Association International (BBSAI) and am enclosing my check for the annual membership indicated below:

☐ Regular membership with one vote—$30.00
☐ Family membership—$45.00 (two people join as a team) with two votes
☐ Associate membership non-voting—$25.00
☐ Junior Membership non-voting—$15.00:
  ☐ 4-H Club member  Age: ______________
  ☐ FFA Club member  Age: ______________

Lifetime Membership Renewal

☐ I have a Lifetime BBSAI membership and wish to keep my active voting status. I understand that I do not need to enclose any payment; I only need to return this form to the BBSAI to keep my voting status activated for the coming year.

Declaration of Primary Breed

☐ I raise American Blackbelly sheep (rams have horns).
☐ I raise Barbados Blackbelly sheep (rams are polled, no horns).
☐ I raise both American Blackbelly and Barbados Blackbelly sheep.
☐ I do not raise either breed of sheep.

Breeder Directory

The Breeders Directory is published on the BBSAI's Web site to help members promote their sheep.

☐ I want to be listed in the online Breeder Directory.
  My Web site (optional) ______________________________
☐ I DO NOT want to be listed in the online Breeder Directory.

Contact Information

First Name ___________________________ Last Name ___________________________

Farm Name ___________________________ Phone1 ___________________________

Phone2 (opt.) ___________________________

Street Address ___________________________

City ___________________________ State/Province ___________________________ Country ________________ Postal Code ________________

Email

The BBSAI will communicate with you using the email address you provide. The BBSAI will not sell or otherwise convey your email address to any third party. If you do not have an email address, you can download the BBSAI's quarterly newsletter from the BBSAI's Web site.

Email Address ___________________________

Signature ___________________________ Date ________________

If under 18, parent or guardian signature ___________________________ Date ________________

If funds are enclosed, make check or money order payable to BBSAI. Personal checks must be drawn on United States Bank. Payment must be in US Dollars (USD). Mail application with payment to this address:

BBSAI
808 30th Lane
Pueblo, CO 81006