



Raising sheep the EASY way!

Barbados Blackbelly Sheep Association International

Blackbelly Banner

American Blackbelly Breed Characteristics

By Andrew Dotson
Socorro, NM

There are many different breeding goals that American Blackbelly breeders strive for but most of the breeders that I have talked to always mention these three:

1) **Breed conformation.** Of course this should be on every BBSAI member's mind when selecting breeding stock because each of us should be trying to better the breed.

2) **Horn size.** This becomes a factor mainly due to the trophy market, which seems to be a large chunk of the market for big-horned rams.

3) **Meat.** Most hair sheep are raised for meat because they don't produce usable wool. This makes them ideal because they have very low lanolin levels in their body, which makes their meat more palatable.



Big Boy owned by Zhanna Holmes, Damon, Texas

Traits to look for in breeding for conformation can easily be found on the [BBSAI Web site](#), so I will touch only on a few "key" traits that most breeders look for.

Breed Conformation

Color seems to be a large deciding factor for most breeders, if a sheep has white on it; it's normally a no go. Most look for a wide strip of black on the neck and a good set of badger markings on the face. Most like the colors to be defined and not "blended" into each other. Most aren't as discerning when it comes to the body color—some like a fawn color; others prefer a dark brown; and others don't care. Most like the black to be dark black, though.

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A Year of Sheep Showing

By Grant Shoemaker
Winner of the 2010 BBSAI Youth Grant Award

[Ed. Note: Youth Grant winners are required to write an essay describing their experience with their Blackbelly sheep and to provide photos. This is Grant Shoemaker's essay.]

Wow! I don't know where to begin. I have never had to write an article for a newsletter before. So I can tell you that in the next few paragraphs I will be telling my story of my first year with my new sheep that I won with the BBSAI Grant Award.

It began early in the morning when I first arrived at school. I was called down to the front office. They told me that I needed to report outside to my Ag teacher. I said why? Well as soon as I walked out the school doors I saw everyone looking in one di-



Me, Ms Joan and my Ag teacher Debbie Parker

rection and pointing. As soon as I saw what they were looking at my heart stopped. It was my FFA advisor Mrs. Debbie Parker and a local sheep breeder Ms. Joan Eubanks, standing right next to an American Blackbelly Sheep. Ms. Joan (this is how I know her now) said to me CONGRATULATIONS Grant you are the winner of the BBSAI \$400 Grant Award. Of course this was in front of so many students and faculty members because they had my school morning show video-taping so the whole school could see me getting this awesome award.

One of my local breeders, vice president of BBSAI and mentor, was standing right next to me when I got that grant. She said "You raise a Barbados or American Blackbelly sheep. Try to get this rare and unrecognized breed



Me and Cinnamon getting a lesson on how to show and groom.

known to the public and show it in your state's State Fair and as many other shows as you can."

My life with my sheep was a challenge and a privilege. Not many people get introduced to a rare breed of sheep and I get to say I did that. During the month of November my birthday was coming up and also was Cinnamon's. She was turning 1 year old and I was turning 14 years old. When December came Cinnamon became more calm by the day and it knocked me in



Here we are showing in the registered sheep class.



The sheep got to dress up for the obstacle race.

the head that the more time you spend with this breed you gain a connection that I never felt or thought of. There are five important rules I found out with this sheep and they are trust, friendship, boundaries, respect, and positive feelings.



I love that BLUE Ribbon.

Later that year, the fair season came and in my opinion it's the best time of the year. My first show was the Florida State Fair in February. I won several cool ribbons. I placed 10th in the obstacle race and then I placed 3rd in the Registered Ewe class and followed by 5th in the Breeding Sheep class. Since this was my first show I was only able to gain the 7th place showmanship placing. I earned 2 blue ribbons, 1 red ribbon, and 1 white ribbon. I enjoyed

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Sheep Showing

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the State Fair and can't wait 'til it comes again next year.



I am showing Cinnamon at the Pasco County Fair and placed 6th.

The next show I entered was the Pasco County Fair. I placed 6th and had another great time showing. The best part about showing is trying to tell people that Cinnamon is not a goat, she is a SHEEP. They just don't get it. But I am determined to let as many people know that these are awesome sheep and their lambs' meat is the best they will ever eat!

After the Pasco County Fair, I showed at the Sumter County Fair in March and I placed 7th. Cinnamon was getting a little anxious as her due date for her lamb was approaching. During our time there she was having contractions and I wasn't sure if she was going to have her lamb there or not. I'm glad to say she waited.



It's a BOY!

The baby lamb was born while I watched. She waited until I got out of school and went to the barn and she had it about 15 minutes after I arrived. It was the coolest thing ever. I named the newborn ram "Rocco." I was able to sell Rocco and I am planning on buying a new ewe to be able to add to my flock.



The SWEETEST face ever....ROCCO

My final show place for Cinnamon and her new lamb was at the Citrus County Fair. I had her on display along with Ms Joan's Barbados Blackbelly sheep. I was showing a steer and rabbits but was granted the opportunity to display and educate people on the American and Barbados Blackbelly Sheep.

I can't wait to start showing again this fall. This has been a wonderful experience and I hope someone else will have the same opportunity as I have had. Thanks again for allowing me to educate others on this fantastic breed.

Grant Shoemaker
Lecanto Middle School FFA
Hernando, FL
2010 BBSAI Grant Recipient



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



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BARBADOS BLACKBELLY SHEEP

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Results of the 2011 Annual Meeting Election

The 2011 Annual Meeting convened by teleconference on November 9 and ballots were mailed after the meeting to elect the 2012 Board of Directors.

The slate of candidates submitted by the BBSAI Nominating Committee was approved by majority vote.

BBSAI welcomes the following members to the Board:

- Mark Fleming
- Patrick Kahn
- Carol Elkins
- Stephanie Parrish
- Sandra Hession

We look forward to new faces and new ideas!

Lianna Banks of Dunnellon, FL, Wins \$400 BBSAI Youth Grant

By Joan Eubank

Lianna Banks is a 12-year-old student at the Dunnellon Christian Academy. I first met Lianna and her mother at the farm and feed store where I work. Lianna began to tell me about the 4-H chapter that she had joined at her school. She was very excited. I asked her if she had chosen her project yet and she said that she had not. I told her about my sheep, showed her photos of them, and told her about other students that had shown this breed in the previous years. I then informed her and her mother about the youth grant that the BBSAI was offering and about the requirements.

Lianna and her mom went home, looked up the BBSAI web site, and printed out the application. Lianna brought the completed application and her essay to me at the store and asked me to be her mentor.

When I was informed that Lianna's essay was chosen as the winning essay, I contacted her mother and asked her to keep it a secret. I then contacted her school principal. We made arrangements to surprise Lianna at the next school assembly. The weekly assembly began as usual and then the principal announced a special guest. I walked in with a lamb and I could see Lianna almost jump out of her seat. I explained to the students why I was there and asked Lianna to come up and meet her new lamb. All of the students had to come up and congratulate Lianna, and of course pet the lamb. Lianna's mother video-taped the presentation and posted it on her Facebook page.

Lianna will be showing her American Blackbelly lamb at the 2012 Southeastern Youth Fair in Marion County, Florida. ✪



Lianna Banks showing her award. Also shown are her grandmother and great uncle (left), mother Suzanne (rear), Joan Eubank (right), and the prize lamb, Eubank Acres Diamond.

Hi, My name is Lianna Jean Banks, and I am 12 years old. The school I go to is Dunnellon Christian Academy. The 4-H group I belong to is called "Pot O' Gold". I look forward to working with and learning about an animal this year.

I would like to show a Barbados or American black belly sheep. I feel this will be both an educational experience and fun experience. In raising the sheep, I will be able to learn about what it eats, what things are necessary for keeping it happy. I already have several questions such as, does it need its hooves trimmed? Is it trainable like my horse? Or are they more like my cattle, where you can walk them on a halter but not too much else. I also would like to know what their personalities are like. Do they just eat and graze? Do they like to play like goats? These are a few things that I think I will learn.

A part of my project, I will have the opportunity to teach others about taking care of show sheep.

I will be able to share with my club, as well as people at the fair about this type of sheep. Training is going to be hard sometimes, but I am excited for a new challenge. I will be able to teach about these sheep.

We have 4 1/2 acres of pasture. The sheep will be on 2 acres of that pasture. It will have both shade, and lean-to that it can use to get out of the weather.

I am very excited about the possibility of having a Barbados or American Blackbelly sheep. I will be able to learn, as well as teach others, everything I have learned by showing this animal. I can help others know and understand about the Blackbelly sheep. It is for these reasons that I respectfully ask that you consider me for the Blackbelly Sheep grant.

American Blackbelly

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Horn growth should be good on males, with the horns not hindering them in any way. Horns on females, however, should just be scurs; most breeders cull ewes with any horn at all and prefer polled ewes.

Most breeders look for a medium-sized body within the weight standards for the breed.

Not surprisingly, a very sought-after trait is for twins, in both the ewe and ram. Some breeders will allow the ewe to have two lambings to produce twins, and if they fail, they will be culled. Others take it a step further and cull ewes that don't have twins on their first lambing. Some breeders report an almost 100% success rate at first lambing twins.

At the same time that most strive



Photo courtesy of Carol Elkins, Pueblo, CO

for twins, most also cull ewes that have triplets or more. The reasoning being that it is hard for the ewe to care for triplets, and breeders report a high mortality rate with lambs that are from triplet births, as well as a high reject rate from the dam of the smallest lamb.

Horn Size

One of the big markets for American Blackbelly sheep is for trophy hunting. As a direct result of the hunting market, there are breeders who breed specifically for that market. The characteristics that are bred for are still close to the breed standards, but some are emphasized a little bit more. The most notable, of course, is

horn size. Most hunting ranches will charge per inch of horn on the trophies that are taken. Also, most hunters want to shoot big-horned animals. Another bred-for characteristic is a high ram-to-ewe birth rate. It might not seem like a good way to expand a flock, but the emphasis in a business is on output of a quality product, and ewes don't have the horns that rams do. Color is still a factor, but not as much as in other breeds such as Painted Desert and BlackHawaiian, which are also used on hunting ranches. Quite a few ranches have many breeds running together.

Meat

The third market that is bred for is probably the largest of all—the meat market. Most of the by-products or “culls” from the other markets end up in this category. The ewes that don't make the cut or the rams that won't make good herd sires normally end up going across the scales or to a specialty meat market somewhere. There are also breeders who cater to this market. They usually select for larger animals because this is a weight-driven market. The coloring doesn't matter as much, although normally a very low seasonal wool content is desired, based on the assumption that the wool content reflects the lanolin content of the meat. Again, high production in the ewes is normally selected because a ewe that produces more lambs makes more money. Some have even gone as far as selecting for the weight gain ratio on different forages to up the conversion of feed to meat. Horn growth isn't as big a deciding factor, although some meat producers do select their rams with horn in mind.

After quite a large canvas of BBSAI's registered breeders, the three distinct categories have emerged. There are always other traits that are looked for across all categories though, such as large testicles in the rams as well as a good sheath. Everyone looks for a good disposition with their animals because they don't want them to be dangerous. Disease resistance is always desired. A low wool content in the winter is normally wanted as well. Some even go as far as not managing their flocks for selection, but allowing natural selection to take place. As long as you have an end result in mind, you can set your own custom selection criteria to what you want to breed for.

All in all there are many strategies out there, but the only person to say they are the right ones in the end, is the breeder. I hope you have enjoyed reading this article and I encourage any feedback you may have. If you have any suggestions for future articles, please let me know. Email me at dotsonar@gmail.com ✉

New BBSAI Members

Lianna Banks	Dunnellon, FL
Tammy Stephens	Browntown, WI
Ruby Troncin	McMinnville, OR

Ask the BBSAI

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

Q: I have been given all kinds of information on vaccinations for sheep, all different. Everything from you don't need to do anything to giving them all but the kitchen sink. Could you please tell me what these sheep need?

A: There is no single magic answer for what kind of vaccinations to give sheep. You are probably getting different answers from breeders because indeed, different breeders around the country have different approaches to raising their sheep. And certainly, different techniques are more or less successful depending on 1) what breed of sheep you are raising, 2) what the health status and background is for your particular animals, and 3) what particular geographical, climatic, and individual farm circumstances you may have at your location.

Some breeders are philosophically opposed to giving vaccinations

or deworming medicine to any of their sheep. They want to raise their sheep naturally and are willing to let "nature take its course" if some of their lambs succumb to parasite problems or other diseases. Those breeders believe that the strongest sheep will survive to breed and that this is the way to best promote the survival of this breed—to ensure survival of the fittest.

Other breeders have the viewpoint that since this breed is already an endangered breed, it is best to give lambs vaccinations for the conditions most likely to bother them, in order to give these lambs the greatest chance to thrive and survive.

So there are trade-offs to either approach. With the no-vaccination, no-worming approach, the breeder must be willing to endure the possibility of some lamb losses (although many breeders across the U.S. report no losses resulting from this approach). A breeder who vaccinates and worms to some degree must be willing to accept the possibility that some lambs with less resistance to disease and parasite infestation will survive to become adult breeding sheep, thus possibly resulting in a somewhat weakened condition of the flock and breed as a whole.

Lambs seem to be the most susceptible to disease and parasite problems, so most breeders who vaccinate or worm will concentrate their efforts on treating lambs, even if they never vaccinate or worm their adult sheep.

There are certain contagious diseases and conditions possibly affecting sheep flocks that can devastate entire flocks or bring down individual lambs, which have nothing to do with proper vaccina-

tion or lack of it. These diseases may come in with unhealthy purchased sheep and may infest the entire flock. Or there may be an environmental condition that is likely to sicken and even kill individuals or whole flocks and that could not be prevented by administering certain medications. In both of these cases, the prudent shepherd/breeder must simply do whatever he can to save his sheep and his flock. He may have to give medication to the entire flock to stop the advancement of a contagious disease. Or he may have to give doses of special medication to fight the onset of some debilitating condition brought on by lack of proper nutrients in the feed, poor weather conditions resulting in spoilage of grass or hay, etc. Or he may have to carefully cull (remove) certain animals from his flock to save the rest of the flock. Examples are OPP, Johne's Disease, foot rot, white muscle disease, coccidia, chlamydia, and several other similar and serious problems.

When there is no threat of transmissible contagious disease in your flock, then you may concentrate your efforts on the most common problems for young lambs and decide if you want to proactively vaccinate and medicate against these common problems, or if you would rather take a "wait and see" attitude and treat only those lambs that become sick.

Here are the most common problems for lambs:

1. **Overeating disease, types C and D (clostridium perfringens, types C and D).** This is a bacteria that can rage out of control in young lambs and kill them quickly, whereas adult sheep have a high resistance to this. Many



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Ask the BBSAI

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vets believe that this is the most important lamb vaccination to give. There is an injectable product called CD/T that is widely available. Usually lambs are given two shots of CD/T vaccine at around 4 weeks and 6 weeks of age. This product also includes a vaccine to protect against tetanus.

2. Tetanus. Lambs can quickly die from tetanus, which can result from infections from cut umbilical cords, tail-docking, or castration. To protect against the tetanus bacteria, many vets recommend the same CD/T vaccine as mentioned above for overeating disease. Again, this shot is usually given twice to young lambs (once at about 4 weeks and the second shot at around 6 weeks).

3. White muscle disease, resulting from selenium and vitamin E deficiency. All sheep need the mineral selenium as a nutrient in their diets. Therefore, all flocks should have free-choice access to sheep mineral blocks or granulated mineral mixtures containing selenium. However, little lambs seldom are able to ingest enough selenium at an early age to offset serious medical problems resulting from a deficiency of this mineral in their diet. Many parts of the U.S. have soils deficient in selenium. Therefore grasses and hay crops from these soils don't contain this necessary nutrient. Severe selenium deficiencies can cause a serious metabolic disease in growing lambs known as white muscle disease. Lambs with this problem can lose all muscle strength and can die quickly if not treated. Many vets recommend that in geographical areas known to have selenium-deficient soils, all lambs be injected once at about 2 to 4 weeks of age with a selenium/vitamin E prod-

uct known as Bo-Se (available by prescription from your vet). The dosage is 1 mL per lamb.

4. Parasite treatments. Growing lambs are more susceptible to parasite infestations than adult sheep, which have developed resistance. Signs that young lambs are heavily infested with intestinal parasites include depressed or sluggish behavior, failure to gain weight, and especially swelling around the lower jaw under the chin and upper throat (this condition is known as "bottle jaw" and is an edema associated with severe parasite infestation—a danger sign that must be dealt with quickly). Many vets recommend giving young lambs at weaning age (2 to 3 months) a dose of oral worm medication (such as safeguard, ivermec, panacur, cydectin, valbazen, ivermectin, or any of the other dewormers designed for sheep and goats). There are breeders who do not adhere to the practice of using chemical wormers. Many of these breeders prefer to use only natural products. A favorite of such breeders is an environmentally safe household soap product called Basic H and manufactured by Shaklee.

These are the most important and common problems that can occur with breeders of young lambs, and these are the issues that seem to be given the highest priority by veterinarians writing for various publications that I read.

Q: I am practicing to be a veterinarian and have chosen Blackbelly sheep to crossbreed with a Dorper ram. Do you have any valuable thoughts for me?

A: If you are trying to produce a commercial hair sheep flock, it seems reasonable to cross Blackbelly ewes with a Dorper ram.

The Dorper will add some size to your lambs, while hopefully preserving the smooth hair coat and the other excellent attributes of either Blackbelly breed. It is important to use a ram that is not too big for the ewes for these first-generation crosses, so that the Blackbelly ewes will not have trouble delivering lambs that are larger than their breed usually produces. The Dorper is considered to be a medium-sized sheep, so this should work fine.



Blackbelly/Dorper cross sheep from [Buffalo Creek Farm](#), Germanton, NC

Other possible hair sheep breeds that you might consider using for a ram would include Katahdin, St. Croix, and Royal White. Some of these will be the same size as the Blackbelly sheep, and some will be slightly larger. You may end up making your choice by simply going to visit the flock of sheep from which you plan to purchase your breeding ram. Remember that the ram should be an excellent representative of his breed because his genetics will determine 50% of the genetics of your offspring.

Also, if you are interested in crossing your Blackbelly ewes with a wool sheep, I have heard that many commercial breeders in the Carribean are using Texel rams for crossbreeding. The Texel ram is a nicely muscled, medium-sized, white, polled, wool sheep. The Texel cross will result in nice muscling in your crossbred lambs, while preserving the positive attributes of the Blackbelly genetics.

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The Barbados Blackbelly Sheep Association International is a non-profit organization registered in the State of Missouri



Raising sheep the EASY way!

The BBSAI Newsletter is a benefit of membership in the BBSAI and is published quarterly. The BBSAI Newsletter welcomes articles, photographs and classified ads that relate to American Blackbelly and Barbados Blackbelly sheep. Publication of articles or advertisements does not necessarily constitute an endorsement by BBSAI. No part of the BBSAI Newsletter (including photographs) can be reprinted, put on Web sites, or used in any manner without written permission of the BBSAI.

Issue deadlines are
January Issue – December 15
July Issue – June 15
April Issue – March 15
October Issue – September 15

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Ask the BBSAI

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Q: I would like to buy bottle-fed Barbados Blackbelly lambs.

A: I recommend that you purchase fully weaned lambs (3 months of age) versus getting bottle lambs. They are just as cute and can be tamed down nicely with a lot of human contact. If you purchase a ewe and ram lamb to breed together as adults, it is particularly important that the ram be fully weaned. Bottle-fed ram lambs usually become dangerous as adults and should be neutered shortly after birth.



If you really want bottle lambs, bear in mind that they will require up to 4 bottle feedings per day until they reach weaning age. Are you willing to provide these round-the-clock feedings every day for up to 3 months?

Barbados Blackbelly breeders rarely have bottle lambs available because Barbados Blackbelly ewes are such excellent mothers. Sometimes a mother ewe might die during the nursing period or reject one of a set of twins or triplets, but those events are rare. Therefore, to sell some-

one a bottle lamb, a breeder would need to deliberately pull a healthy lamb from its mother prior to weaning.

Barbados Blackbelly breeders are generally hesitant to take an otherwise vigorous, healthy lamb from its mother before weaning. This is because our top priority is to successfully oversee the raising of these baby lambs to adulthood or to a healthy weaned age with no problems. Our primary mission is to protect and preserve this rare and endangered breed. Barbados Blackbelly mothers provide care, nourishment, grooming, protection, and education for the little lambs in ways that we humans do not fully understand. It is hard for humans to do as good a job raising lambs as the natural sheep mothers can do.

Because taking an unweaned lamb from its mother is risky, a buyer should have previous experience raising bottle babies (lambs or goat kids). A buyer without this experience should purchase fully weaned, 3-month old lambs. These lambs will have the best chance of survival and will have the advantage of good, natural mothering and nourishment during the first 3 months of their lives. ❄