



Raising sheep the EASY way!

Barbados Blackbelly Sheep Association International

# Blackbelly Banner

## Change Is Coming to the American Blackbelly Registry

By BBSAI Board

First a little history that many of you, particularly newer members, may not know: In 2004, the BBSAI split its registry into separate registries for the horned American Blackbelly (AB) and the polled Barbados Blackbelly. This action enabled the BBSAI to work toward two parallel goals: 1) to support the newly standardized American Blackbelly breed and help it to develop and gain respect in the U.S.; and 2) to preserve the critically endangered Barbados Blackbelly (BB) bloodlines in the U.S. and protect them from being crossed with other breeds.

In 2008, the BBSAI "closed" the BB registry, meaning that a sheep could be registered only if its parents were already registered. This ensured that no genetics from other breeds would be allowed to contaminate the registered gene pool. And, as anticipated, the perceived and monetary value of registered BB stock increased because there weren't a lot of them and it was harder to create more.

The BBSAI recognized that it was not time yet to close the AB registry. It was too soon after standardizing the AB breed; the number of registered foundation animals needed to be increased to ensure sufficient genetic diversity before closing the registry. The BBSAI has monitored the population of registered AB sheep since

then and has determined that it is now time to close the AB registry.

The practice of "closing" a breed registry has become synonymous with the term "purebred livestock." As Phil Sponenberg writes in "Managing Breeds for a Secure Future" (American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, 2007), "Closed populations do serve to isolate breeds, and as a consequence serve to consolidate them as repeatable, predictable genetic packages." Currently, the BBSAI allows an AB sheep to be registered on its own merit. If its phenotype (what it looks like) is in line with the published breed standard, then it is registerable. This practice fails to address the "repeatable, predictable" genetics of the animal. Just because it looks like an AB sheep does not necessarily mean that its offspring will look like AB sheep.

As an example, an AB ewe bred to a Katahdin ram is likely to have twin lambs, one of which is phenotypically AB and the other pure white. The phenotypical AB lamb can be registered as a purebred. However, the unsuspecting buyer of this lamb is in for a rude shock when her offspring sport varying color patterns of blacks, browns, and white.

Many BBSAI breeders work hard to build repeatability and

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## AB Registry Changes

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predictability in their flocks by conscientiously breeding to select for certain traits and culling out other traits. This requires working through several generations of animals and keeping good records.

But all too often, members purchase sheep that "look like" AB sheep at auction or from breeders who do not register their stock. As the example above illustrates, a lot of times, sheep from flocks that are clearly crossbred are selected because they have AB phenotype and registered as "purebred" animals. Once registered, these animals assume the same value as animals having a six-generation pedigree.

As a result, the sheep community devalues ALL American Blackbelly sheep because they perceive no difference between the common barbado and a registered, multi-generational American Blackbelly. This does a great disservice to BBSAI members who have worked persistently toward improving their flocks and the AB breed as a whole.

Therefore, the BBSAI believes that to satisfy its mission to improve and promote the American Blackbelly breed, we must stimulate the need and desire to register AB animals so that the monetary and perceived value of registered AB animals increases. To do this, we must first close the American Blackbelly registry.

In support of this, we offer the following points for our members' consideration:

1) There is a difference between purebred AB sheep and crossbred sheep or barbado sheep, which cannot always be observed in individual animals but is present in

their genetics.

2) The makeup of these AB sheep is the result of deliberate crossings in the USA over a certain period of time resulting in the named and standardized AB breed, in 2004.

3) The resulting genetics of the AB breed must be stabilized and standardized through a documented breeding program to keep it from further evolving into various crossbred animals, and thus diluting the evolved AB breed as it currently exists.

4) The genetic pool of AB sheep is large enough to provide a foundation of these currently standardized and pedigreed animals, so that all future registered AB stock may descend from these particular animals.


5) To create an added value for registered and pedigreed AB sheep, they must become less available and more "sought-after." They must be more "special" than the average barbado of unknown and possibly mixed heritage.

6) We reject the idea that AB sheep are not worth registering simply because they don't command a high selling price. Rather, the registration of these AB animals in a closed-registry program will act to create a monetary added value as the pedigreed and registered AB sheep become sought after for their stabilized and reliable genetics.

7) All breeders should remember that there are two separate markets, and that the monetary value of pedigreed AB sheep as breeding stock is not highly related to the slaughter value of these sheep. This applies to all other breeds as well. Although

the slaughter value is currently high, the breeding stock value should NEVER be lower than the slaughter value. A high breeding stock value is possible to sustain with registered AB stock because of the reliability of their genetics, regardless of the direction of slaughter market prices. This value does not happen overnight, but must be cultivated over time, by both individual AB breeders and the promotional efforts of their BBSAI registry organization. The best thing that AB breeders can do to support and develop this breeding stock value is to set reasonable prices for breeding stock and stick by them, combining sales with service and reputation for excellence.

To kick-start the closed-registry process, the BBSAI will provide a "sundown period" during which members can register their undocumented AB sheep before the AB registry closes. **This sundown period will end on December 31, 2012.** Animals registered during this sundown period will be the last group of undocumented AB sheep to be registered. As of January 1, 2013, only sheep whose parents are registered will be considered for registration.

We encourage our AB members to take advantage of this opportunity to get their foundation AB stock registered if they are not already registered. If you have any questions, email them to [info@blackbellysheep.org](mailto:info@blackbellysheep.org). 

### New BBSAI Members

Sue Sarles	Matagalpa, Nicaragua
Hayley Williams	Noblesville, IN
James Savage	Mayfield, KY

## Basic Corner Catch Pen

By Mary Swindell

This is a drawing of a basic corner catch pen for sheep. This pen is useful for people who don't have a working stockdog. You can build this out of two gate panels, set in the corner of your corral or field, such that they create a small square pen (about 6 or 8 ft square), and such that the gate hinge makes the front open to form a "Y" funnel opening. It helps

to attach a rope to the outer edge of the swinging gate, so that a second person can stand a few feet further out from the end of the "Y" funnel, making it an even bigger "Y" opening.

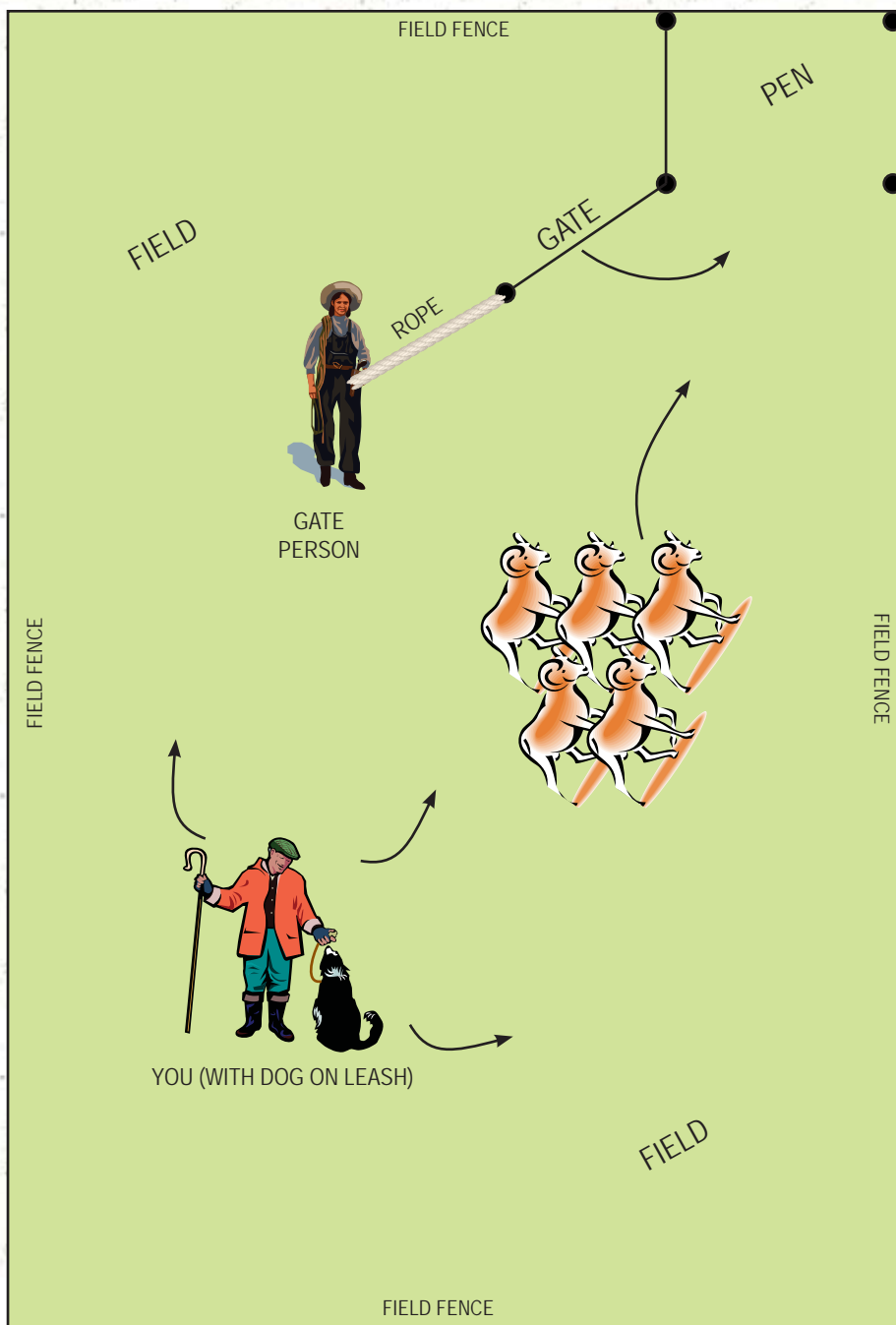
Maneuver the sheep into the "cone" area (the area inside the "Y") by **slowly** walking inward. Watch the sheep heads. If they turn away from the entrance, they are thinking of escaping. Stop and

stand still for a moment to let them calm down. Then inch your way forward. When necessary, slowly step to the left or right as you make your way to the gate entrance to help balance the sheep toward the opening.

If the sheep bolt past you and the gate person, just start over. The gate person doesn't have to stand by the gate at first, either. He can start further out and slowly make his way toward the edge of the gate and his rope.

Remember, slowly does it. Inch by inch. Slight movements of your hand, arm, leg, or stock stick have a huge effect on these animals. If you feel that you are scaring them, then slowly take one step backwards, and turn your body to the side. That takes some of the pressure off them and helps them relax.

Most people who have sheep eventually get a trained stockdog, and then they wonder how they ever survived without one. But some of this gathering work can be done without a dog, just as I've described above. The only disadvantages people have in moving livestock are that 1) they can't read the livestock as well as dogs can; 2) they can't react as appropriately and move into position as quickly as dogs can; 3) they aren't as intimidating to the stock as dogs are; and 4) they don't have as much energy as dogs have. But within certain limitations, people can motivate livestock in the exact same way that dogs can, if they just learn to read the sheep's "thoughts" based on watching the stock and if they learn to move in the right way to control the movements of the stock. ❖



## Scurs in Purebred Barbados Blackbelly Rams

By Carol Elkins and Mary Swindell

Many senior Barbados Blackbelly breeders remember the early years in our flocks' histories (1998 through 2008) where we struggled to purge our bloodlines of unwanted traits such as non-shedding woolliness and scurs and other protrusions on a ram's head making him less than "polled." We worried that these traits resulted from crossbreeding somewhere back in the pedigrees of our early BB stud rams. In those early years, all of our animals came from somewhat vague breeding, where owners had not kept careful records and it was uncertain that the animals were 100% purebred BB sheep. The problem was compounded by breeders referring to both the horned and polled blackbelly sheep as "Barbados Blackbelly" or "Blackbelly Barbados." Buying ewes from these breeders often resulted in entire bloodlines being contaminated with horned genetics.

We were greatly relieved when the BBSAI split the registry into two separate breeds, created a separate breed standard for the American Blackbelly, and eventually closed the Barbados Blackbelly registry. This prevented any more incrossing of horned stock into the BB registry.

In 2005, several Barbados Blackbelly breeders were given the opportunity to obtain purebred Barbados Blackbelly sheep originating from the research flock kept by Dr. Stephan Wildeus at Virginia State University (VSU). These sheep descended from sheep imported directly from the Caribbean and from the closed research flock at North Carolina



Scurs and "knobs" on purebred Barbados Blackbelly rams are not uncommon. Photo courtesy of Stephan Wildeus, Virginia State University

State University. The infusion of these purebred genetics was the lifeblood of our breed's conservation because breeders not only mixed the new genetics with those of their existing flock but also linebred the new genetics to keep them pure and to increase each VSU bloodline's animal count.

After we received the VSU sheep in 2005, we discovered from our own breeding experiences and also from talking to Dr. Wildeus of VSU that small scurs were a regular occurrence even among his purebred BB stock. We also hear from breeders in the country of Barbados that scurs and sometimes full horns crop up in their flocks. Therefore, it is evident that small scurs on rams are a naturally occurring phenotypical variant among purebred BB sheep in their original Caribbean environment.

If we want to preserve a broad genetic base for this breed, it would make sense to keep the scurred as well as the horned animals in the communal gene pool. For this reason, the BBSAI Breed Standards Committee chose to allow a fairly generous scur size of 1.5 inches for registerability. This allows breeders who wish to breed for a much more restricted scur size (such as smooth-polled only) to do so, but it also enables other breeders to work to preserve other attributes instead of singling out smooth polledness as the most important attribute to preserve. Hopefully as different breeders select their individual breeding goals, the breed as a whole will survive with a broad genetic pool, which will include smooth-polled as well as scurred animals.

## Lamb Lover's Cookbook—a Bargain at \$2.99

The BBSAI is proud to announce that its Lamb Lover's Cookbook is now available for sale on Amazon.com in both print and Kindle versions. The Kindle version is only \$2.99!

**You don't need to own a Kindle to use the cookbook.**

Amazon provides a free Kindle reader that allows you to read any Kindle-formatted e-book.

At \$2.99, it's a bargain you can't afford to miss. Lamb Lover's Cookbook contains over 100 mouth-watering ethnic dishes, casseroles,

soups and stews, BBQs, crock-pot and pressure cooker recipes, Weight-Watcher recipes, and recipes for every cut of lamb you can imagine. There also are recipes for making sausage (even one that doesn't require any special equipment or casings), marinades, and rubs.

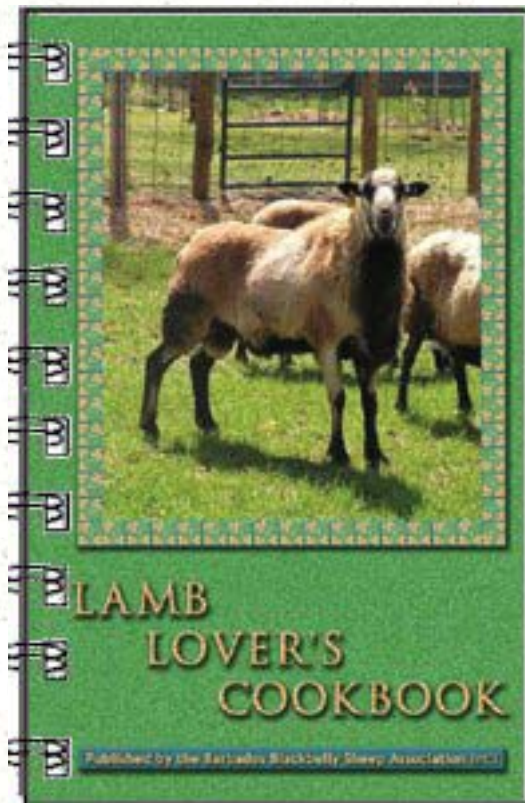
With recipes compiled from hundreds of home kitchens, Internet recipe swaps, and five-star restaurants, the Lamb Lover's Cookbook will be the only cookbook you need. When you want to try a new recipe with those chops you

purchased at the supermarket or with that whole lamb stashed in your freezer, a quick flip through this cookbook will give you lots of ideas.

You will love this cookbook's back-of-book index. It is professionally written to ensure that you can quickly find a recipe by name, category, meat cut, or major ingredient. The cookbook is filled with photos of BBSAI members' beautiful, exotic Barbados Blackbelly and American Blackbelly sheep. You will want one for yourself and several more for gifts!

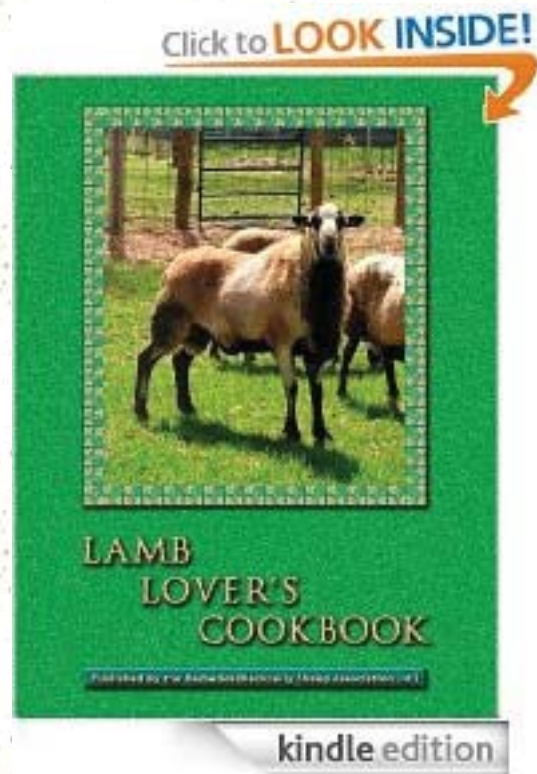
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## Ask the BBSAI

Questions sent to [info@blackbellysheep.org](mailto:info@blackbellysheep.org) are answered by BBSAI Registrar Mary Swindell.

**Q:** I own a 1-year-old Barbados Blackbelly ram who is getting rather nasty. I do not dare turn my back on him. He has only butted me once, but he challenges me every time I come into the pen now. I don't know if I just lack sufficient "presence" or if it is him. He has also been aggressive with my LGD puppy, to the point that I do not allow the puppy with him unless I am actually right next to her. Any insights you might have would be appreciated.

**A:** He probably will get much worse. Generally a ram becomes aggressive at around 2 years of age, so your ram is displaying this behavior very early.

Rams in some bloodlines can be more aggressive than in other bloodlines, so it is possible that aggressiveness is partly an inherited trait. The way in which a ram lamb is raised can affect his aggressiveness too. Bottle lambs and lambs handled and coddled by the breeder often become aggressive because they haven't learned to fear humans. Lack of fear ensures that they can test—and prove—their dominance as adults.

You should get as many nice lambs as possible out of this ram and then get rid of him. Meanwhile, always carry a stick, shepherd's crook, walking stick, or even a cattle prod when you are in his pen. If he even takes a few steps toward you, swat him smartly across the bridge of the nose. Be sure he understands that you will not only defend yourself, but you might even beat him to the punch just because you're feeling grouchy!!! He should learn to fear

you to the point where he will not try anything with you while you're looking. And do not ever turn your back on him without knowing exactly where he is and how quickly he can sneak up on you.

Never to trust a ram—any ram. The stakes are just too high. And never let anyone into the ram pasture unless you are with them to help "read" the ram's behavior. NEVER let children into the ram pen. There just isn't a good enough reason to let a child in there. If parents are visiting and want to look at the rams, the kids can wait just outside the fence.

**Q:** I have some lambs that I plan to sell this spring. Should I register them before selling and, if so, do they need to be tagged and named? Or would it be better to supply the buyer with copies of the parent's registry so they may register and name the sheep themselves. Also, if they have to be named can they be issued a number instead and then the buyer change it? I also need to know if I am going to be participating soon in the scrapie program and I re-tag my adult sheep, will the numbers in their registry need to be changed or should I leave the old tags?

**A:** The USDA requires that all sheep that leave your farm be tagged with a scrapie tag. You do not have to tag sheep that remain on your farm. And you do not need to replace any existing tags with scrapie tags--just put the scrapie tags in a different ear and leave the old tags. It is never a good idea to remove any tag. You should notify the BBSAI registrar Mary Swindell of the sheep's new scrapie tag number so that she can enter it in her database to help provide traceability for that sheep back to your farm.

Although it is perfectly all right to sell unregistered sheep, if you want to establish yourself as a reputable breeder, you should register the sheep before they are sold and you should name them so that they bear your farm's name and their registration number contains your flock prefix. Their name and registration number can never be changed; they are permanent. Generations down the road, people will be able to tell that their sheep descended from your farm's bloodlines. As you improve your flock, your bloodline will become known in the sheep community and your sheep will command a higher price. None of that will be possible if you do not register your sheep before you sell them.

When you sell your registered sheep, you will need to sign the form on the back of the Certificate of Registry and give the certificate to the buyer. That way he can prove to the BBSAI that the sheep is legally his when he transfers ownership in the registry. He may not care if his sheep is registered or not and he may not bother to transfer ownership. But perhaps he will sell someone else his sheep and because they bear YOUR farm tag, the new owner will be able to identify them as registered sheep of your farm's bloodline.

**Q:** I am working on setting up a Web site on [wordpress.com](http://wordpress.com). Am I able to use any of the BBSAI information on my Web site or should I just have it as a link? Also what about pictures?

**A:** Any information that is on BBSAI's Web site is copyrighted by BBSAI. Therefore you cannot use it because you don't own it. You can link to it. You can rewrite it in your own words and use it. Or

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## Ask the BBSAI

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you can use it and give attribution (indicate where you got it or say something like "reprinted with permission from the BBSAI" and link to BBSAI's Web site).

But before you say that you are reprinting with permission, you need to ask for permission. This applies to ANY copyrighted material, not just the BBSAI's. One of the biggest problems with WordPress users is that they just grab and paste into their own site any image or text that they find on the Web. That is stealing.

I can't tell you how many times BBSAI's Webmaster has found the photo of my two sheep pasted on WordPress blogs, claiming it to be a photo of the blog owner's sheep. And every time she finds something like that, she notifies the blogger that they are infringing on copyrighted material and threatens them with notification to their server (usually WordPress or sometimes the Web hosting company). If they persist, then she threatens them with a lawsuit. Generally, that stops them.

**Q:** I have three American Blackbelly sheep (all non-neutered adult males). I used them to keep our weeds down. I was thinking of selling one or two of them but I have no clue what they may be worth. Can you give me an idea?



**A:** Telling you that in general, American Blackbelly sell for between \$75 and \$400 isn't going to do you much good, but that is the range I see posted. Prices vary across the U.S. depending on

- how much it costs a farmer to raise the animal and still get a profit at sale time

- what buyers in your local community are willing to pay
- what your market is (breeding market, meat market, herding market, trophy market)

To help you narrow it down, ask and answer the following questions:

1. How old are the sheep? Lambs (under 1 year of age) can be sold for slaughter as lamb; older sheep sell as mutton when slaughtered. I know of one breeder who sells her lambs at \$3.50/lb live weight, meaning she gets about \$315 for a 9-month-old lamb. But she has worked hard to develop that niche market. They would sell at auction or at market for far less. Barbados Blackbelly breeding sheep sell for between \$250 and \$300. American Blackbelly generally sell for between \$75 and \$150.

2. Who might want to buy your sheep?

- Blackbelly meat is particularly popular with ethnic markets.
- Breeders might be interested in your rams if they have nice horns.
- Trophy ranches will pay top dollar (\$400 or more) for 4-year-old rams with exceptional horns.

3. What are other sheep selling for in your area? Look in the newspaper, on Craigslist, and at the BBSAI's Classified site at <http://blackbellysheep.org/classified.html> to get an idea of who you are competing with.

I hope this helps. There is no simple answer; you will have to dig around a bit more to get the best price for your sheep. In general, I'd start at \$200 and if you get no buyers, be prepared to lower your price.

**Q:** I have a 5 month-old American Blackbelly ram. He was a bottle baby and we've castrated him, so he's a pet. I just want to give him good care. Can you suggest books, websites, etc. that I could go to for questions? I am unsure about de-worming, tick meds, feeding requirements. I just don't want to do anything wrong or neglect something because I lack knowledge.



**A:** There are two excellent books with lots of tips about raising sheep:

- Storey's Guide to Raising Sheep, by Paula Simmons and Carol Ekarius
- Managing Your Ewe and Her Newborn Lambs, by Laura Lawson

There are many articles about raising sheep in the past issues of the BBSAI Newsletter (online at the BBSAI Web site, at [www.blackbellysheep.org](http://www.blackbellysheep.org), on the "Association" page, under "Newsletters."

There also are many articles about raising sheep on BBSAI's Web site, [www.blackbellysheep.org](http://www.blackbellysheep.org), on the "About The Sheep" page, under "Articles."

And you can subscribe to the Blackbelly Listserv, an excellent e-mail group for those who either raise blackbelly sheep or are just interested in learning about them. You can join this free e-mail group by going to <http://www.blackbellysheep.info/> and clicking on the "Subscribe" button. This e-mail list has a great reputation for being friendly and helpful to folks everywhere, no matter what their level of knowledge. ❀

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.

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## BBSAI Board Votes

05/30/2012

Vote to close the American Blackbelly registry and put both registries under the same policies that previously governed the Barbados Blackbelly registry.  
(5 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](mailto:newsletter@blackbellysheep.org)

