



Raising sheep the EASY way!

Barbados Blackbelly Sheep Association International

Blackbelly Banner

Animal Planet Visits Barbados Blackbelly Sheep Farm in Colorado

By Rick Gagnon, Indian Hills, CO

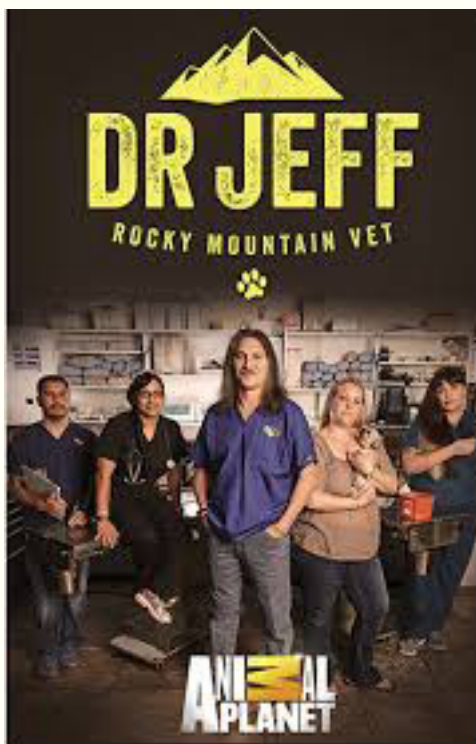
[Ed.: Now into its second season, Animal Planet's reality-TV veterinarian show, "Dr. Jeff: Rocky Mountain Vet," recently arranged to film sheep at BBSAI members Rick and Cindy Gagnon's farm west of Denver, CO. This is Rick's report of the adventure.]

We were contacted in late March by the producer of the Dr. Jeff Rocky Mountain Vet TV show and asked if we would consider allowing his team to film an episode featuring our Barbados Blackbelly sheep. He had discovered our breed online and was fascinated by their appearance and their near extinction in the U.S. The show features interesting opportunities for Dr. Jeff to do vet work.

We were flattered to be asked, and I explained to the producer that BB sheep are popular for the very reason that they DON'T require a lot of vet care. Because

our sheep didn't have any urgent veterinary needs, I suggested that the purpose of Dr. Jeff's visit could be to help us establish a relationship with a large animal vet who would be willing to make house calls. We

health of our small flock, give some tetanus vaccinations, and check out the dogs. The female dog had recently developed a limp that we speculated could be arthritis and we wanted a vet's opinion.



The Dr. Jeff Rocky Mountain Vet show containing footage of Barbados Blackbelly sheep is scheduled to air Saturday evening, July 9 on Animal Planet, 9PM Eastern

The crew from Animal planet arrived at our place early on a Saturday morning in April. The crew consisted of a camera, sound, producer, PA, and two vets. They stayed for 4 hours and filmed much of the time that they were here.

The show's star, Dr. Jeff Young, owns the very busy veterinarian practice "Planned Pethood Plus" in Denver. He was accompanied by Dr. Rachel Nichols, one of the 30 staff at his bustling clinic. Dr. Jeff's

told the producer about our Barbados Blackbelly sheep and our Anatolian Shepherd/Great Pyrenees guardian dogs. We asked that the vets evaluate the

passion is spaying and neutering cats and dogs in an effort to control the population that ends up in shelters.

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Cataracts in Sheep

By Kerry Murphy, DVM, Eldersburg, MD, and Nancy Johnson, West Friendship, MD

Last fall, my vet Dr. Murphy diagnosed a cataract in my ewe Betty's right eye. I decided to breed Betty one more time, and she had a single ram lamb this spring. All lambs answer their mother when called or go running to her. At about a week old, this little ram started to wander away. I'd hear Betty calling, often more than she should have to. Her ram didn't answer or go running to her. As Betty called to him, she walked around, but not necessarily in the direction of any sheep. She acted as if she couldn't see, and one time she ran into me as if I wasn't there. Dr. Murphy recommended that I put the ewe and lamb into a small stall to reduce the ewe's stress. What follows is Dr. Murphy's report and information to help better understand cataracts in sheep.

A cataract refers to the opacity of part or the entire lens of the eye [Figure 1]. Cataract means "to break down." A break-down of the normal architecture of the lens or the lens capsule leads to an increase in fluid within the lens, causing opacity/loss of transparency and a reduction in vision. The progression can be rapid (as with Ovine Heritable Cataracts) or can occur slowly over several years.

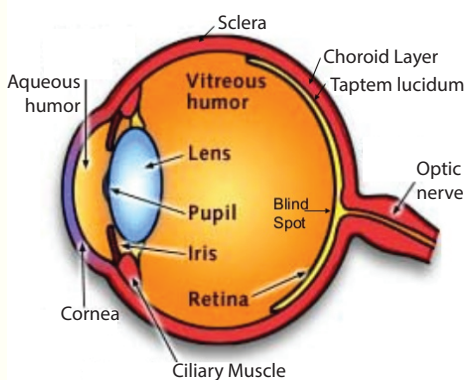


Figure 1: Cataract Anatomy



Nancy Johnson's ewe Betty with cataract in left eye

Many cataracts are hereditary and may be present at birth or soon after. Cataracts also may occur as a result of trauma to the eye, toxin exposure, metabolic disease, or inflammatory disease. The cause of Betty's cataracts is unknown. Diagnosis is made simply by examining the eyes and classifying by location of the cataract in the lens and degree of development. Examination of the retina should accompany any examination for cataracts. We were unable to exam Betty's retina in the field due to the severity of her cataracts (complete cataract).

There may not be specific signs or symptoms associated with cataract development until signs of

blindness occur (non-specific signs may include stumbling, apparent confusion, agitation, somnolence, running into stationary objects or other animals, not following the flock, and vocalizing for the flock/lambs). As mentioned previously, diagnosis is based on visible evidence of a cataract on physical examination.

The effect of cataracts on vision can be varied from mild cloudiness to complete blindness. We suspect Betty can see variations in light, but is in effect, completely blind.

There are no effective medical treatments for cataracts. The only therapy is surgical removal of the lens. Removal is most commonly

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Animal Planet

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Dr. Nichols is an experienced large animal vet and surgeon. She has a calm demeanor and is adept at handling very large animals. Although she has worked primarily on horses and cattle, she has experience with pigs, goats, and most importantly to us, sheep.

When Drs. Nichols and Young arrived, they impressed us with the research they had done on the Barbados Blackbelly breed. They knew a lot about the breed and about hair sheep in general.

The entire crew were friendly, helpful, caring, and confident. We and the doctors jumped right in to examine each of our five ewes and two rams. We showed them how to use a sheep chair, which is a very useful tool that looks like a lounge chair with legs that hook over the rungs of a fence. Once the chair is in place, you need only to back the sheep into a sitting position in the chair. With her weight off her

legs and her feet in the air, it's easy to trim a sheep's hooves, listen to heart and lungs, inspect bellies, and even tag an ear.

The doctors seemed to really appreciate the sheep chair!

Together we trimmed hooves, checked out teeth, and listened to heart and lung sounds. The vets gave tetanus immunizations.

Both of the vets were great at handling sheep. They are quick on their feet, something very important when dealing with this breed, and their calm yet confident approach set the sheep at ease.

Their visit was a very positive experience. We've even had a follow-up conversation with Dr. Nichols concerning Bella, our female dog. It turns out that she does have arthritis, and with the right treatments and medications, she's doing very well.

I need to pause for a shout out here; we purchased some of our sheep and the two dogs from Carol Elkins and they are all wonderful animals. The dogs are so friendly, yet they know what their job is. We love them. And, sometimes I forget that these are Barbados Blackbelly sheep because they are so friendly. We often sit in the yard in the evening after working around our small farm, and the sheep like to gather around us. Our ewe Vanity is so used to being handled that she'll stand for a very long time in one place and let us pull off her winter coat in small chunks. And, their coats are long and thick from living at an elevation of 7,200 ft in the foothills of the Rockies.

We hope that the Dr. Jeff Pet Vet show will give Barbados Blackbelly sheep some great exposure to attract new breeders. It was a fun (and hectic) experience that was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to show the world how beautiful these sheep truly are. 🌿

Cataracts

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performed by a surgical procedure where a small ultrasonic probe is placed into the eye and breaks down the cataract, which is removed by suction. Surgical treatment is rare in small ruminants due to the associated procedural cost versus the animal's value. Hereditary cataracts are generally easily controlled by culling affected animals.

The prevalence of cataracts in sheep is not well described. It is possible that the seemingly rare occurrence is because we do not generally allow sheep to live to the age where age-related cataracts occur. When cataracts do occur, it is important to consider multiple factors to determine the appropriate treatment route. Sheep are prey animals and may be highly stressed by having reduced vision/blindness. If you are unable to surgically treat the animal and they are showing signs of stress (agitation, bolting, vocalizing, not eating, etc.), euthanasia should be considered. Some sheep may tolerate reduced vision if kept in a small area with familiar animals where they can learn their environment and are safe from predators. You should consult your veterinarian to consider which option is best for your animal.

References:

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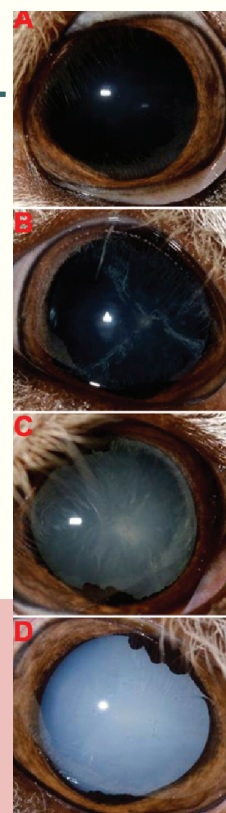
Figure 2: Examples of cataract progression.

A. Normal lamb eye without cataract

B. Stage 2 cataract with opacities at the suture lines

C. Stage 4 cataract with more than a third of the lens surface opaque

D. Stage 6 (mature) cataract



How to Group Sheep to Create Starter Flocks

By Pam Hand, Free Union, VA

I have over 40 sheep and several bloodlines that I'm trying to conserve. This is the first time I have had sheep to sell so this is my first attempt at making starter flocks for new breeders. I needed to figure out which sheep I should keep for my three lines and which sheep I could sell. Then from those potential "sell" sheep, my next task was to decide how to group them for starter flocks. So here is a method I came up with.

1. Using index cards in different colors, I make one card per sheep. Rams and ewes in each of my three bloodline are different colors, so I use a total of six colors. Blue, white, and purple are ewes in the three lines; and the pink, yellow, and green are rams in those lines.

2. On the front of the card, I write the sheep's age, bloodline percentage, and the codon 171 DNA status for scrapie resistance if I know it. On the back of the card, I draw out a 3-generation pedigree.

These cards provide a visual reference as I'm moving them around in possible combinations. The goal is to group rams with ewes in starter flocks that are related but not too closely related.

3. Now that my cards are ready, I first select the ewes and rams that I want to retain for my three bloodlines and remove their cards from the project. In the photo, they are the bottom three groups from left to right. I want to keep 8 ewes in each line and at least 2 rams—heir and spare.

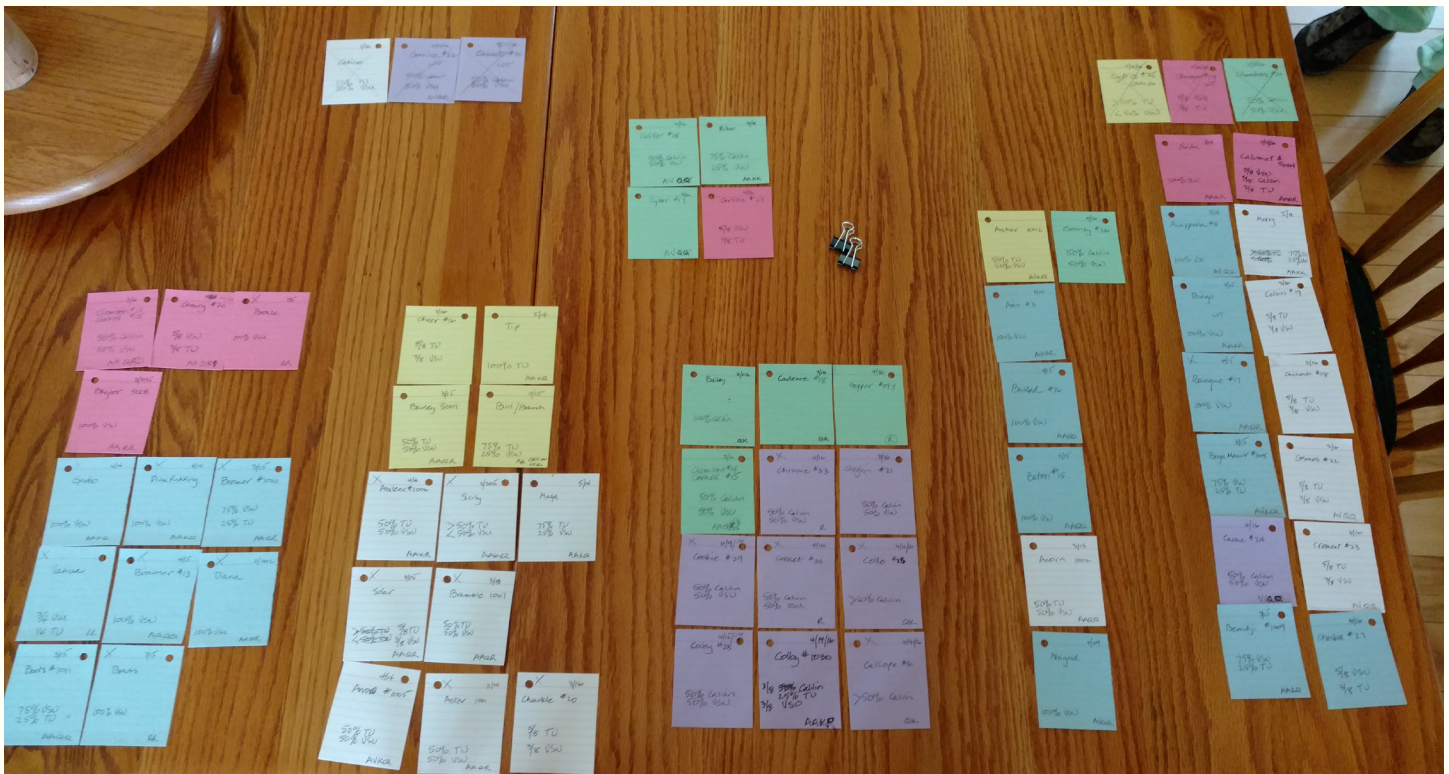
4. Next, I remove cards for any sheep that I plan to sell for slaughter or whose disposition remains uncertain. These are the top-most three groups.

5. Lastly, I rearrange the remaining cards into various experimental groups to determine the best combination of sheep for a starter flock. I try to build starter flocks that contain two rams and at least five ewes.

In this project, I was able to put together three starter flocks, shown as vertical columns on the far right. Two of the groups still need a second ram to go with the pink one in each group, and I'll likely select from the green rams in the "undetermined disposition" group, top middle.

I find this method to be more flexible and easy to use than trying to maneuver the sheep names around in a spreadsheet or writing out lists of sheep on scratch paper. The colors provide quick visual cues about a sheep's sex and bloodline; and when it is necessary to know more information for final assignments, that data can be quickly read on the card.

I retain the cards for the sheep that remain in my flock so that the next time I need to create starter flocks, all I have to do is make new cards for the new lambs. ✨



BBSAI's New Facebook Page



By Elaine Haas, Chair,
BBSAI Social Networking Committee

Our BBSAI Facebook page has been up and running for about 6 months now. I have posted several links to seminars, our newsletter, and interesting happenings with our sheep. The link for the BBSAI's Facebook page is <https://www.facebook.com/blackbellyassociation/>. You do not need to be a Facebook member to visit this page.

I will continue to post timely articles and information to the page. If you have an article or information that you think would

be of interest to someone looking at our page, please feel free to send it to me. Anyone can post to the visitor's column. Someone recently posted a request for a BB ram in the notifications section. I referred them to our Web site and the Breeders Directory. I hope that anyone searching Facebook for information on blackbelly sheep will find this page, read all the good information about them, and become future buyers and breeders of our sheep.

I also set up a group page for Barbados Blackbelly sheep (shown below) that is not connected to

the BBSAI. It is a great place to advertise sheep for sale or ask/answer questions regarding BB sheep. Because it is a group page, you can post to the main body of the page. You do have to be a FB member and join the group. The link to this page is <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1546546692334878/>

Facebook provides these two great opportunities to showcase and advertise our sheep. Please take advantage of them. Email me at social@blackbellysheep.org. ✉



Ask the BBSAI

Send questions to
info@blackbellysheep.org

Q: I have a very aggressive and mean American Blackbelly ram. Is this unusual? He's tore up gates, fences, and works on his own shed with his horns. I'm not safe around him.

A: Aggressive rams are not uncommon. The bad behavior is often the result of the ram being treated as a pet when he was young (petted, handled a lot). Rams work on a system of hierarchy; the alpha ram is boss. Pet rams grow up having no fear of humans. When their testosterone kicks in, they are programmed to want to better their hierarchy. So they start fighting with each other and with humans in an effort to win the alpha ram designation. If they are the ONLY ram in a flock, their humans are the only available targets.

There is nothing you can do about an aggressive ram except breed him to get a replacement ram and then butcher him. I once had a ram whose sole purpose in life was to kill me. He would willingly walk into a cattle prod to get to me. The only reason he lived as long as he did was because I was able to put

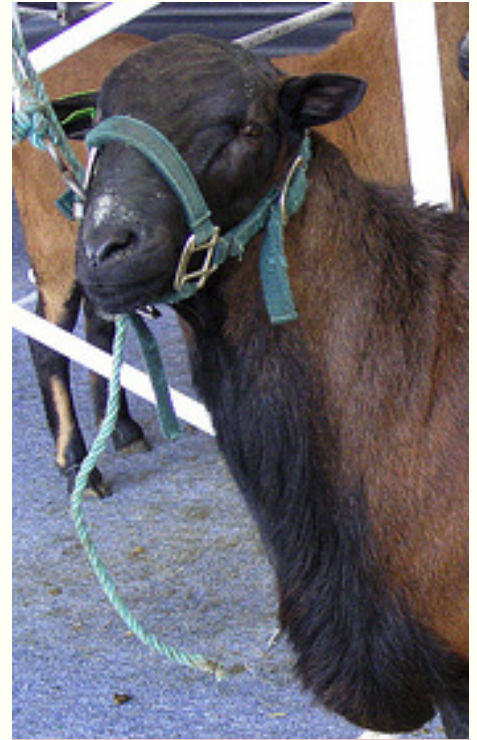
my herding dog between me and the ram. The ram respected the dog. As soon as he gave me lots of ram lambs, I butchered him for my own table.

Rams are dangerous, as you obviously know, especially to women and children. Never turn your back on him.

Q: We have been raising blackbelly sheep for about 4-5 years now and have had at least 6 totally black ones born, 5 females and 1 male. How common is this?

A: Blackbelly sheep can span a wide range of color variations, including solid black. When American Blackbelly sheep were developed by crossing Barbados Blackbelly with Mouflon and Rambouillet, many color combinations resulted. Several of those combinations were selectively bred into distinct breeds, including Painted Desert, the Texas Dahl, and your all-black Black Hawaiian. The genetics of the various color combinations are not always bred out and may reappear many generations later.

I assume that your blackbelly sheep are American Blackbelly (rams have horns). If the black facial barbs on your all-black



This handsome ram would not be registerable because the black facial bars are not detectable from the rest of his black face

sheep can be distinguished from the rest of the black coat, and if the parents of your black sheep are registered, then you can register the black lambs. If the parents are not registered, then you might want to do some research into the Black Hawaiian sheep breed to learn what their requirements are.

Q: I'm thinking about signing up for the local fair this year, but in order to have an animal display, you have to show an animal. I have a couple of ewe lambs I'm thinking about, but I need some help on how to set up a lamb and some tips on training and grooming.

A: The sheep must be clean; the show barn should have a washing pen complete with warm water. You bring your own shampoo. Rinse the pen out afterward.

To show the sheep, you should halter train it before the fair. You will have to stand the sheep and hold it steady with other sheep



Photo courtesy of Tiana Franklin. Older ram is Stomp & Steer Shooter and the younger one is Slow Down Ruger.

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Ask the BBSAI

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there. The judge will look at the front, the back, and the side. He will want to see the sheep move. For standing, you want to stretch the body out a little to show the nice long back. Be sure your sheep is not standing cow-hocked and that it is nicely balanced on its feet. The judge will also want to look at the sheep's head, so you may have to remove the halter for that.

The 4H kids here are not allowed to use halters, so they put one hand behind the sheep's head and the other hand under the sheep's chin. If you have a stubborn sheep, you are allowed to have another person pushing from behind. Sheep unused to halters can be moved like horses—a tug, then ease up, then another tug, etc. The adults generally used halters.

I took two rams, and fortunately there were no ewes in heat. The wool ewes usually come in heat in the fall, but most hair sheep breed year round. The pens are not terribly high, but my sheep did not attempt to jump out.

All sheep had to stay in the pens at the fair for a full week. The showing is toward the end of the week. You are expected to keep your sheep pens clean, although at the end of the fair we were told just to leave, and the fair people would clean the pens. Take a full bale of straw, and fill up the pens. Then you can just remove the dirty straw twice a day. I took vanilla wafers and encouraged visitors to give them to the sheep.

Q: The breed standard states: "The coat consists of coarse hair that lies flat against the skin." Does this mean a smooth coat vs a wavy coat? Here are two photos of a one month old lamb with a wavy coat compared to cohorts with a smooth coat. Would you choose against a wavy coat or is there no preference at this age? Does



Curly coat versus smooth coat on lambs



anyone know if this is predictive of shedding in the future or not?

A: When we wrote the breed standard, we had not yet seen a curly coated BB sheep. That was before the bloodlines that this trait shows up in had been available to use. So we were not trying to discourage curly coats; we were just trying to describe the coats as we saw them on the sheep we knew.

I have found that the curliness is most noticeable in young lambs, but in some sheep it never entirely goes away. It would be interesting to track the heritability of this trait. In an otherwise good sheep, I would not discriminate against a

curly coat. If it complicates the ability of a fly to bite, it might be considered a benefit!

New BBSAI Members

Casey and Nikki Huxoll	Boardman, OR
Tammy Stephens	Browntown, WI
Michael Kinsey	Aylmeer, ON
Henry Paradis	Barhead, AB
Dexter and Leslie Phillips	Newport, TN
Sedrick and Michele Sweet	Oakhurst, TX
Dan and Dorita Thompson	Elpaso, IL
Mary Vandenheuvel	Zeeland, MI

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 business cards 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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July Issue – June 15
April Issue – March 15
October Issue – September 15

Please send changes of address to
BBSAI
808 30th Lane,
Pueblo, CO 81006

or email
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Back issues can be downloaded from

<http://www.blackbellysheep.org/association/newsletters/>

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Online Famacha Certification Now Available

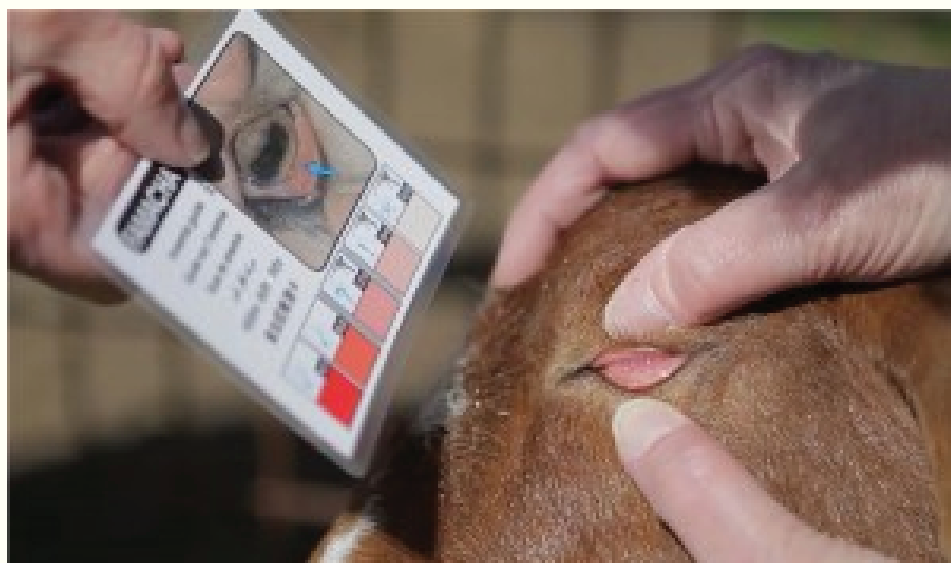
Reprinted from the University of Rhode Island Web site at <http://web.uri.edu/sheepgoat/famacha/>

Use of the FAMACHA® system allows small ruminant producers to make deworming decisions based on an estimate of the level of anemia in sheep and goats associated with barber pole worm (*Haemonchus contortus*) infection. The barber pole worm is the most economically important parasite affecting sheep and goat production on pasture and the most common cause of anemia during the grazing season in most of the U.S. It has a small "tooth" that lacerates the animal's stomach (abomasum) wall, and it feeds on the blood that is released. This can result in anemia, (reduction below normal in the number of red cells in the blood) and in severe cases, death.

The FAMACHA® card, developed in South Africa, was introduced to the U.S. by the American

Consortium for Small Ruminant Parasite Control (<http://www.acsrpc.org>). It is a tool that matches the color of the eye mucous membranes of small ruminants with a laminated color chart showing 5 color categories that correspond to different levels of anemia.

Category 1 represents "not anemic" with category 5 representing "severely anemic." The FAMACHA® system uses the scores determined with the card to identify and selectively deworm sheep and goats with anemia. Selective deworming minimizes drug use and slows the development of drug resistant GIN parasites. It can also aid in selective breeding decisions by identifying those animals that are most susceptible to barber pole worm infection.



Cover, Push, Pull, POP!