



OUT TO PASTURE FARM FLOCK

The Barbados Blackbelly Sheep Association International is a non-profit organization, which has defined the following goals as its corporate mission:

- Raise, preserve, improve, promote and publish facts pertaining to American Blackbelly (horned) and Barbados Blackbelly (polled) sheep.
- Register and keep on file all records of registrations and transfers of American Blackbelly and Barbados Blackbelly sheep in the United States.
- Support and promote the interests of American Blackbelly and Barbados Blackbelly sheep breeders.
- Work together and exchange information and ideas that will be helpful in raising and preserving American Blackbelly and Barbados Blackbelly sheep.
- Improve the genetics of each generation of sheep, including artificially inseminated sheep.
- Develop better markets.

BBSAI NEWSLETTER

February

2020

Inside this issue:

✓ Unique Opportunity

We need your help now!

SVF and Smithsonian

✓ Get Acquainted

Out to Pasture Farm

Jeff and Melissa Gibbons

St. Augustine, FL

✓ Welcome to New Members

UNIQUE AND AMAZING OPPORTUNITY IF WE ACT NOW !

You can help preserve Barbados Blackbelly sheep long into the future by participating in an exciting opportunity. There is a nonprofit organization called SVF dedicated to cryopreserving samples from endangered livestock species for an animal 'seed bank' which will be curated by the Smithsonian. The cryo-repository has 106,109 units of germplasm from 39 livestock breeds as of August 2019. BB are the next breed of sheep chosen to be collected.

BBSAI has been asked by SVF (Swiss Village Farm located in Rhode Island) to provide 5-6 rams and 15-20 ewes which best represent both the proper characteristics of our breed as well as the widest possible genetic variation in the pedigrees. If catastrophe occurred, the breed could be recreated using surrogate sheep to produce purebred BB. More information about SVF is included at the end of this article so that you can learn about them and feel comfortable with their mission and their procedures. A few expected questions are also answered. Please feel free to contact the BBSAI board with any questions or concerns you might have: info@blackbellysheep.org

All of the following steps would be done at no cost to you:

- 1) Selection of possible animals
 - a. Market price paid to you of between \$275-\$500 each; or a tax deduction if donated; or returned to you at no cost at the end of the program if free-leased.
 - b. All animals must be registered and of breeding age, ideally already proven producers.
 - c. BBSAI board will work with SVF to insure that animals meet requirements of breed as well as genetic diversity (that is, not all individuals closely related – so we must choose sheep from different 'lines').

- 2) Extensive veterinary testing on your farm working with your own veterinarian (no quarantine required, although ideal)
 - a. Caseous Lymphadenitis, Johnes Disease, Brucella, Ovine Progressive Pneumonia (OPP)

- b. Bluetongue
 - c. Internal Parasites Fecal flotation
 - d. Breeding Soundness Exam
 - e. Psoroptic mange, foot rot, pinkeye, sore mouth, lice (visual inspection)
 - f. Vaccines – current Rabies and CDT required
 - g. Interstate Health Certificate signed by accredited veterinarian
- 3) Animals passing all the tests would then be transported to Rhode Island by SVF staff in July 2020 for more veterinary testing and 30 day quarantine there.
- 4) Animals are cared for by an SVF staff of 17 plus 5 veterinarians from the Tufts University's Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine.
- 5) Sheep are settled on the main farm and collections start in September 2020.
- a) Animals may spend anywhere from nine months to two years on site.
 - b) At the end of the process all are returned at no expense to the breeder if leased.
 - c) If they have been sold to SVF, SVF will offer them for sale with help of the BBSAI to ensure distribution to breeders to help maintain our genetic diversity. For example, if animals are brought to RI from west of the Mississippi, it is possible that those can end up on the east coast to help breeders there improve their flocks.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

Please look at your flock and consider which animals you might be willing to free lease, donate or sell to SVF for this wonderful opportunity. Send a list of your potential candidates as soon as possible to info@blackbellysheep.org. Include the names, reproductive and health history, as well as a description as to why you think these individuals would be good for the germplasm bank. Remember that genetic diversity is as important as the actual traits of the animal so that we save the widest genetic variability for the future.

The BBSAI board is determining how best to choose candidates and will be in touch with those who submit names. We need to act fast so that we can meet the deadlines set by SVF. Previous breeds have had several years to gradually provide the animals but we do not have that luxury.

SVF

SVF was founded by Dorrence Hill Hamilton, heir to the Campbell Soup company. She purchased a 45 acre property called Swiss Village Farm in Newport RI in 1998. The work of collection and cryopreservation began in 1999 and is to end in 2021 so this cycle is the last.

Our breed is so lucky to be asked to join the list of animals included in the bank! The goal is to collect 200 embryos and 3,000 straws of semen per breed (and other tissue such as blood as well), so that SVF will be able to “reawaken a breed, with its full genetic diversity, within one generation. This library of frozen material is vital to the protection of the world’s food supply.”

“Rare or heritage breeds of livestock carry valuable and irreplaceable traits such as: resistance to disease and parasites, heat tolerance, mothering ability, forage utilization, and unique flavor and texture qualities. A particular breed that now dominates the marketplace may find its future jeopardized for any number of reasons. For instance, highly inbred and genetically uniform breeds, which dominate the industry, could be decimated by a serious infectious disease. Recall the Irish potato famine: A single variety of potato, which sustained a population, was devastated by blight. Alternatively, consumer preference could shift toward different flavors, textures or agricultural practices. With the lack of diversity in today’s animal agriculture, we are at tremendous risk.

Many people are familiar with a similar form of germplasm preservation—seed banks. These collections are critical to food security and the protection of genetic diversity in plants. Although there are numerous seed banks throughout the world, little effort has been made to collect germplasm for rare and endangered breeds of livestock.”

Please take the time to read more about the mission of SVF and their process.

<https://www.svffoundation.org>

FAQ

- 1) Is there any other repository of already stored BB samples?

At present there is only semen from 28 BB rams stored in the USDA program National Animal Germplasm Program (NAGP) which was collected in 2003 from the BB flock at VSU and Carol Elkins' sheep.

- 2) Why do we have such a tight time schedule?

SVF was set up to complete its mission in 20 years and 2019 is the 19th year, so there is only funding to provide for one more year.

- 3) What will happen if my sheep are selected for testing but do not pass all the tests?

Those animals selected for testing but not meeting all the requirements will not be taken to RI. SVF pays the veterinarian directly for all the testing regardless of results, so you would not be expected to pay anything even if your animals are not taken by SVF.

- 4) Are the sheep harmed by the collection process? That is, will they be 100% OK to come back and continue breeding on my farm afterwards?

While there cannot be 100% guarantees in biology, all animals at SVF are cared for by experienced staff plus many veterinarians to protect the animals' health throughout the entire process.

- 5) Can I visit my animals while they are at SVF?

Due to strict biosecurity to protect the health of all the animals at SVF and the need to avoid cryopreserving any known diseases along with the genetic material, visitors are not allowed except for one open house day each year. You can read about the SVF 2020 open house here: <https://www.svffoundation.org/news/2020-annual-visitors-day/>

- 6) What else would be expected of me if I choose to participate?

SVF asks breeders to provide information about each sheep and honesty is essential, as well as previous careful recordkeeping about health and reproduction. Also you would be asked to remain in contact once animals are placed back on your farm (or

their new farm if re-sold). It is important that the sheep show continued reproductive success so that SVF and the Smithsonian know that the sheep are still fertile.

Get Acquainted

Jeff and Melissa Gibbons
Out to Pasture Farm
St. Augustine, FL



Please let me start by saying how honored my wife and I are to be this decade's first shepherds to be highlighted in the BBSAI newsletter. We're new to this game, but have already felt very welcomed by this Association as well as the other members we've had the pleasure of meeting.

We are Jeff and Melissa Gibbons. A couple of years ago we decided to invest in some property upon which we would build our 'forever' home and, God willing, start a small, sustainable farm. Our original plans had us raising sheep for meat, ducks and chickens for eggs, and bees for honey. And while we are still planning on adding the other aspects to our operation, we are focusing on the sheep and ducks for now.

So how did we decide on raising Barbados Blackbellies? We were introduced to the breed by a local forestry agent who was raising them on his own farm. He had come out to help us with a plan to conserve our natural tree population while opening up enough space on our land for both us and our animals. Our original plan was to have one or two to act as self-propelled lawn mowers, but we came to the realization that having one or two dozen sheep really doesn't take that much more effort to care for than just a couple of sheep. We put our thoughts down in a business plan and concluded that we could start a farm that would be self-sustaining in 3-4 years. After some in-depth research, we decided that the Barbados Blackbelly breed was the breed for us (size, hair coat, original habitat, natural disease and parasite resistance, etc.).

Our current flock is composed of one ram, six breeding ewes, and six immature females. Our original business plan had us building the flock up to 25 breeding ewes, but we've come to the realization that our grazing land is less fertile than originally expected (the woods and the shade produce great forages, but not exceptionally rich pastures). Therefore, we've adjusted our ideal flock size down to a more reasonable size of about 12 breeding ewes plus lambs. We'd also like to work with other breeders to set up a ram exchange. We envision a co-operative group of breeders, each with a ram, who regularly trade breeding stock to ensure genetic diversity and overall flock health for every farm in the ram exchange program.

Speaking of health, we have learned a ton over the last year. Last year started out both dry and mild. In fact, this lasted for about 6 months. Then the rains and heat really kicked in! It rained almost every day for two months. For those familiar with *Haemonchus contortus* (barber pole worms), you know that they thrive in hot / wet environments. Well, even with the focused effort of our veterinary team, we ended up losing four breeding ewes and 9 lambs (1-2 months old) to this terrible parasite. Since there's no way for us to control the weather, you may be asking what we've done to prevent this from reoccurring. We've become much more educated on parasite symptom identification, treatment, and control. We've subdivided our pastures with extra fencing to facilitate a much more aggressive pasture rotation plan. And we've partnered with our county extension agent to improve the soil quality so our pasture fertility and grazing output is greatly improved. Has this worked? Judging by the behavior and body condition of our sheep, yes! All of our animals seem happier (running, playing,

and jumping) and healthier (low to no fecal worm count, full/thick coats, good weight gain, and great FAMACHA scores). The true test will come in the summer when the torrential rains come, but we feel much better prepared to fend off a parasite attack and keep all of our flock healthy.

Our breeding plan started out to be very aggressive. We had planned on three lambings every two years. This plan is proven, but we've come to the realization that it puts a very heavy strain on our ewes and isn't in keeping with our underlying philosophy of raising the happiest, healthiest flock we can. It's not that our flock couldn't be happy and healthy with an aggressive breeding schedule; rather, we feel our flock can be both happier and healthier with a slightly less aggressive breeding plan of a single lambing per year. While a large commercial farm may not have the latitude to ease up on their breeding schedule, we do have that latitude so we will use it!

So what makes us unique? The answer comes from the answer to another question. What would make a city girl from Columbus, Ohio, and a military / commercial pilot turn to farming? Well, I've got to say that it's more for me than for Melissa. I retired from the Navy in 2007, after more than 20 years of service, and went on to fly 757, 767, and 747 aircraft internationally for UPS. That career was cut short when I threw out my back and was no longer able to safely complete my duties. After 7 operations I was basically forced into early retirement. For a few years my time was consumed with medical procedures and rehab. Afterwards, I felt I was missing a purpose. These animals give me that purpose I was missing. Now we work together to tend and care for the sheep and ducks we're raising which fulfills my need for purpose and it has brought us closer together as a couple (after a short 30 years of marriage). At Out to Pasture Farm...farming equals family!



Welcome to New Members

This feature will return again in the next newsletter. My apologies to any members who have joined recently who are not recognized at this time.



BBSAI NEWSLETTER

EDITOR
Pam Hand, DVM

4330 Springwood Drive
Free Union, VA
22940

The BBSAI Newsletter is a benefit of membership in the BBSAI and is published several times per year. Articles, photographs, and business cards that relate to American Blackbelly and Barbados Blackbelly sheep are welcome. Submit your contributions to newsletter@blackbellysheep.org

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 BSBSAI.

Back issues can be downloaded from <http://www.blackbellysheep.org/association/newsletters/>