



ZOAR LUCIUS SENECA

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

January 2021

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The American Blackbelly Breed Standard

by Zeb Akers

I was giddy with excitement when I bought my first sheep. I'd spent the better part of a year trying to choose the best breed for our farm, and had become enamored with American Blackbelly. Finally seeing them in person was a watershed moment. I immediately knew that I'd chosen right. They were three yearling ewes, a little shabby with the last of their first winter's wool still hanging on, but I barely noticed as we loaded them into my equally shabby cattle panel trailer. Though they hailed from good stock they of course still had a few flaws, but at the time they looked absolutely perfect to me.

It took a while for the tint of my rose-colored glasses to fade, but eventually I was able to pick out traits that I did and didn't like in my sheep. I used those traits to guide my search for the "perfect" ram, but soon found that there were almost as many opinions on the ideal American Blackbelly as there were breeders. Turning to the BBSAI breed standard for guidance, I quickly realized why there were so many different opinions. Though it was a good starting point, as a new breeder I was confused by the standard's subjective language and lack of specificity, as well as the failure to qualify some common traits that I considered undesirable. I assumed that my confusion was merely due to inexperience, and that with time I'd figure it out. However, three years and several conversations later I've concluded that our current American Blackbelly standard could use an overhaul.

I brought this up at the annual BBSAI meeting in November 2020 and learned that I was not the first to do so. However, being comprised of only Barbados Blackbelly breeders, the board did not feel it their place to impose or suggest any changes to the American Blackbelly standard. I was taken aback but honored when they asked me to chair a committee to address the issue, and humbly I accepted. Knowing that the expertise of more seasoned breeders would be essential to doing this right, I reached out far and wide for support. The response from breeders willing to contribute was spectacular, and in no time we had assembled a diverse team of breeders from across North America to get this project rolling. What follows is a brief summary of who we are, our progress thus far, and plans going forward.

The American Blackbelly Standard Committee is comprised of 7 members, who collectively have 74 years of experience raising American Blackbelly, with flock sizes range from a dozen to over a hundred. Our members are:

Crystal Smith - Northwest Canada Representative (whispering-pines-farm@outlook.com)

Doug Noyes - Central Canada Representative (rustyironacres@gmail.com)

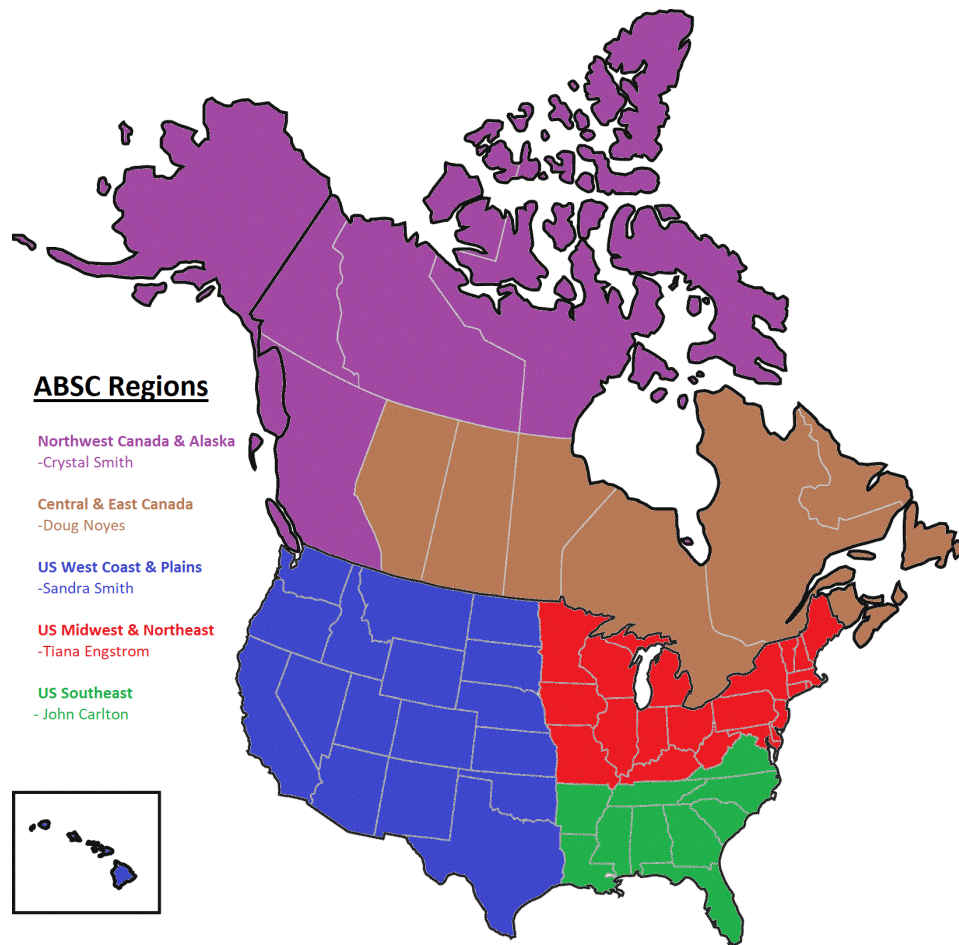
Sandra Smith - West Coast & Plains Representative (robinsoncreekranch4@yahoo.com)

Tiana Engstrom - Midwest & Northeast Representative (tiana@stompandsteer.com)

John Carlton - Southeast Representative (doubleifarms2@gmail.com)

Becky Lannon - BBSAI Board Representative (becky73lannon@gmail.com)

Zeb Akers - Chairman (gratefulakers@yahoo.com)



Our stated goal is to revise the current American Blackbelly breed standard in such a way that:

- it is objective and specific, leaving less room for individual interpretation
- it promotes and provides a framework for the improvement of the breed
- it represents a general consensus among current AB breeders
- it is supported and adopted by a majority of AB breeders
- it does not create undue barrier to entry or registration

To accomplish this goal we plan to gather input from as many American Blackbelly breeders as possible, and then use that input to guide us as we make revisions. Currently we are developing a survey to distribute among American Blackbelly breeders, and are taking painstaking efforts to ensure that it is both thorough and practical. We hope to have the survey sent out by February, and will have a paper version so that we are able to include breeders who do not have access to email. We want to be as inclusive as possible with this survey, so that we ensure the new American Blackbelly standard is something that we can all agree on and promote for the improvement of the breed.

I hope that all American Blackbelly breeders reading this will lend their support to this project by at least completing our survey. We desperately need your contribution during this process, as any standard that is

produced without your participation would be worth no more than the paper it's printed on. I cannot overstate how we much need and value your input. If you are willing to participate in the survey, but have not yet been contacted by one of our committee members, please send your contact information to

GratefulAkers@yahoo.com

Lastly, should you have any questions, comments, concerns, or suggestions about this project please do not hesitate to reach out to me.



Our first three ewes Apollonia, Begonia, and Daffodilia posing next to Huck, our first ram

Get Acquainted

(Part 2)



Roman and Elva Miller

Knoll Acres Farm

Harrisonburg, VA

This is the continuation of the original article by Roman Miller about Knoll Acres Farm. You can reread the first part, including footnotes, at:

<https://www.blackbellysheep.org/newsletter/2020/2020jun.pdf>

Belize Sheep Exportation Project

Sometime during the late summer of 2017, I received an international phone call inquiring about purchasing some of our Barbados Blackbelly lambs. After listening a bit to the conversation by someone who was speaking with a strong accent and who identified himself as an official with the Belize government, I was ready to dismiss the conversation as another scam. However, I asked, "how would you get my sheep from Virginia to Belize?" His response was that a shipping company would arrange the details.

The next day I received a phone call from Bruce Cluver, representing Ag World Int'l who was following up on the initial request. The agreement was that two persons representing Belize and one person representing Ag World Int'l would visit Knoll Acres to look at the available lambs I had for sale. An appointment was made, and the representatives did come and visit.

What was the goal? The Belize agricultural ministry with cooperation from agricultural experts from Taiwan developed a project to enhance the quality of sheep and goats in Belize. Specifically, the project had three major goals:

- Improving and expanding the National Sheep and Goat Breeding Center at Central Farm in Belize.
- Importing high-quality pure breeds to renew existing stocks.
- Building capacity among Central Farm technicians, staff, and local sheep producers



At the time of their visit, the representatives chose six ewe lambs and two ram lambs for purchase. Due to exportation requirements, these lambs needed to be health checked and certified (blood tests, etc.) and then quarantined for a minimum of 30 days. Ag World Int'l agreed to pay a 50% deposit to hold the lambs, pending adequate health reports and then pay the balance when the lambs would be scheduled for shipment. In addition, they agreed to pay all veterinary costs, costs that emerged from fixing a quarantine facility, as well as a per diem charge to maintain the lambs during the quarantine period. Part of the difficulty of the quarantine for us was the need to keep the ram and ewe lambs separate.

I ended up walling off a section of the sheep barn with black plastic sheeting from the rest of the barn and putting the ewes and rams in separate pens within the walled off area.

The disease testing was quite extensive requiring blood tests, sheep disease history in our county, and veterinarian sign-off on these requirements. Specifically these included negative tests and assurances for:

- Ovine brucellosis
- Ovine epididymitis
- Lentiviruses: Maedi/Visna
- Enzootic abortion of ewes (EAE, primarily *Chlamydia abortus*)
- No Scrapie present during the past 10 years on the farm and not endemic in the area
- No contagious agalactia reported 6 months prior to shipment or enzootic abortion of ewes diagnosed during the past two years.

The sheep were required to receive a treatment for internal and external parasites in the 15 days prior to shipment.

In our case, we went through the testing above with negative results, reflecting the healthy status of our lambs. However the verifications by our local veterinarian also required authorization by regional veterinarians. The initial potential block was the issue of Scrapie. Although we have never had this disease in our flocks during the 25 years of raising sheep, our farm was not officially certified as Scrapie-free. In addition, a county veterinarian indicated that two cases of Scrapie had been found two years earlier in a flock within our county (about 12 miles from our farm). While I was unaware of that occurrence, that seemed to violate the provision that Scrapie was “not endemic in the area”! That was an initial problem and several exchanges occurred among us, our local veterinarian, a regional district-level veterinarian, our shipper (Ag World Int'l), and the Belize Agricultural Health Authority. The “problem” was finally resolved with the Belize Agricultural Health Authority amending the requirement to read “no Scrapie on the exporting farm or neighboring farms within a 10-mile radius”! Talk about “red tape”! There were other examples, but this was the most difficult one.

Several of our Barbados Blackbelly ewe lambs in quarantine; the ram lambs are on the other side of the wooden wall. Both pens were separated from the rest of the barn by plastic sheeting.



These discussions caused a delay in shipment of the lambs. Initially they were put into quarantine on our farm late in November, with the planned shipping date late in December. Due to the 'red tape' issues, their shipping date was delayed until late January, after a quarantining of almost 60 days. Eventually the Belize Agricultural Health Authority sent me (via Ag World Int'l) the final permit to import Live animals with a finalized shipping date.

Early on the morning of January 26, 2018, the shipping trailer arrived at our farm. In the prior days before arriving at our farm, the shippers had picked up a small flock of Dorper lambs from a sheep farmer in Iowa. The Dorper lambs were on the same trailer where our lambs were to be loaded; however, the lamb groups were separated. After leaving our farm, the haulers were scheduled to stop in South Carolina to pick up more Barbados Blackbelly lambs from another breeder. All these sheep were then destined for Miami, Florida to be loaded on an airplane and flown to Belize.



Loading Knoll Acres lambs for shipment to Belize

A few weeks later we received notification that our lambs had safely arrived in Belize and were being quarantined again for 30 days on the Central Farm of Belize. After that they would be entered into their breeding program.

So, what are our learnings from this experience? First, I was glad to be a part of this experience and am global enough to believe that it is worthwhile to aid Belize farmers to enhance their sheep genetics with these imports. Hair sheep in Belize make a lot more



USA imported lambs in Belize. Note the Dorper lambs in the foreground and some of the Barbados Blackbelly lambs in the back

sense than heavy woolen sheep. Second, it was a lot more work and effort than I expected. The "red tape" that emerged made the project frustrating and at times I thought everything would fall through. Part of the frustration was that I had turned away a lot of potential USA buyers because I had reserved these lambs for export to Belize. If the export effort were unsuccessful, I was not certain how I would market these lambs elsewhere. Third, after the fact, I realized that there was a lot of money involved in this animal transfer and that the initial sale price that I had put on the lambs was a very minor part

of the finances. So if I would do it again, I would definitely increase the sale price to help compensate for the extra work involved. Finally, I am so appreciative of Ag World Int'l and the calm assurance of Bruce Cluver, who carefully and consistently "shepherded" this entire transaction. They did a great job.

I imagine the opportunity will present itself again down the road a bit. Interestingly, I received a phone call again from Ag World Int'l inquiring if I currently had more Barbados Blackbelly lambs for sale. I did not.

This is the end of Part TWO of the Get Acquainted piece by Roman Miller. His summary is included below which has been slightly modified from the first installment.

Summary and Conclusion

I have attempted to describe some highlights that we have experienced in raising Barbados Blackbelly sheep. In my estimation they are a unique and valuable breed. I hope their progeny can continue to increase and spread. I do think it is important to maintain and to incorporate as much genetic diversity as possible since the gene pool is somewhat limited.

Success in raising Barbados Blackbelly sheep requires economic sustainability. Currently in my situation, profitability is heightened by the fact that most of my available lambs are sold for breeding purposes and consequently their sale prices are higher than market sale prices. In the future, other niches will need to be found and utilized for economic sustainability.

In looking forward, I want to continue to develop the Knoll Acres flock using breeding rams with Scrapie resistant genotypes (i.e. RR at codon 171). Currently my one breeding ram, Springwood Ebb, is homozygous for the resistant genotype. I initially thought my other breeding ram, Bellwether Winston, was the same. However some of his offspring this past year were homozygous QQ (not resistant), leading me to change my opinion of Winston's genetic status. The point being that if the sire is RR then his offspring (depending on the status of the ewe) will have either the RR (resistant) or RQ (partial resistance) genotype and not be QQ. I'll take a blood sample in 2021 from Winston and verify his genetic status for codon 171.

Currently, most of my ewes are either homozygous QQ or heterozygous, QR. During the next several years as my homozygous susceptible ewes age, I intend to replace them with heterozygous or homozygous resistant ewes. In the process, I do not want to lose some of the great phenotypic characteristics of my foundation lambs, who were all homozygous susceptible (QQ). Consequently, a couple of generations of heterozygous ewes will help preserve some of those characteristics.

Update on SVF

By Pam Hand, DVM

From January thru July 2020, BBSAI worked with 6 breeders in the US to select and send representative Barbados Blackbelly sheep to SVF in Newport RI for collection and cryopreservation of germplasm for the Smithsonian.

With much effort, and the majority of the cost paid for by SVF, the following sheep are there:

Breeder / Owner	Rams	Ewes
Rita Guill in WA	BC Five-Oh; GA Trent	BC Ann Bonny
Sundi Prechtel in CA	RVF Gus	RVF Gracy, Geri, Gwen, Gloree
Elaine Haas in MO	BW Ticonderoga	SS Jade, Winona, Caitlyn, Hazel, Ursula, Wonder, Stella
Pam Hand in VA	Spr Forest, Elmo, Furlong	Spr Bingo, Grinnell, Finikia, FondaJane, Gretel, Eclipse, SS Brass, PP Daisy
Lita Hazlett in NY	H Tiberius	H Nikki, DipnDot
Sandy Hession in MA	SH COL Caesar	SH MAV Amber

Sandy Hession and I were privileged to visit the facility (social distanced and masked of course) in October to see all the sheep, meet the marvelous staff, and enjoy the incredible scenery. Collections of tissue, blood, eggs, semen, and fertilized embryos are in process there, and what a process that is! For example, in order to collect the embryos, the ewes' heats are controlled using a series of hormone injections, and then each is put in for 24 hours with the selected ram for natural breeding. Then the ewes are further treated with injections and at the right time after fasting overnight, taken to a surgical suite in pairs for the embryo collection. Being in a pair reduces some of the normal stress a sheep experiences when removed from her flock, and this stress is further minimized by having a full pen mirror on one wall of the holding pen in the surgery suite. That way when one ewe is anesthetized and on the surgery table, the other ewe still thinks she has company. During the surgery the abdomen is opened and the uterus flushed to collect the embryos which are then examined under a microscope before freezing. Each ewe undergoes this collection procedure only twice, and SVF reports that usually females of all the other rare breeds undergoing this collection continue to be productive after return to normal life on the farm. Let's hope these BB sheep, both rams and ewes, will also continue to produce lovely lambs in 2021 and beyond.

We are getting some very interesting information from SVF about the results. For example, CAITLYN, 89 pounds, bred with Ticonderoga: 27 out of 30 embryos were frozen (an amazing record!).

BINGO, 96 pounds, bred with Elmo and 20 out of 24 embryos collected were frozen.

BRASS, 105 pounds, bred with Five-o and 5 out of 5 embryos collected were frozen.

Some of the collections have not produced freezable embryos for a number of reasons, like the breeding did not take or the embryos were damaged.

The information on the rams has also been interesting. For example, Spr. Forest, who sired lambs on my farm before being sent to SVF, originally produced normal semen with good numbers, morphology and motility, has suddenly had decreased quality of his semen so he is getting a mini vacation from collecting and breeding to see if he recovers. His personality seems to have changed during his time there as well. On Springwood Farm he was very tame and affectionate, very easy to handle. At SVF he initially managed to jump over a 48" fence so he now has extended cow panels around his pen. At first he was easy to work with there but

during his break from breeding he became a bit aggressive toward the staff entering his pen. His semen did not freeze well which of course does not mean that with natural on-the-farm breeding he could not produce quality lambs again. But his job at SVF is to produce semen for freezing and to fertilize embryos for freezing and he is not doing that yet. Five-Oh on the other hand has had 6 collections of semen which resulted in 203 straws (breeding 'doses') being frozen; and he was used once for breeding and 10 of the recovered embryos were selected for freezing so he has a 91% cryo rate so far. Good job Five-Oh!

The current plan is for the collections to continue until the spring of 2021. Some of the sheep will go back to the original breeders, and SVF has graciously volunteered to breed each ewe to a selected ram there before departure. Some of the sheep will go to different breeders so as to help spread our rare genetics around. SVF will help with the transportation which is usually one of the main stumbling blocks for such exchanges. This is a marvelous and once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Barbados Blackbelly sheep to be added to the Smithsonian collection for the future, and also for breeders to exchange genetics across the USA.

If you have any questions or comments about the SVF program, please feel free to contact me at pjhand@embarqmail.com.

Welcome to New Members

Shaley Carwile	Crystal River, FL		Carrie and Roger Grissom	Bellville, TX
Jacqueline Tinker	Frost, TX		Maria and Richard Olson	Edgewood, BC
Thomas Maschler	Germantown, MD		Cynthia Gonzalez	Leesville, LA
Nathan and Anna Alpers	Modesto, CA		Mark Griffin	Mckinney, TX
Kerry Rapelje	Calhan, CO		Martin Offenbacher	Elkton, VA
Angela Caldwell	Monroe, NC		Stuart Lipman	Summerfield, FL
Joseph Searles & Hed Smith	Brooklyn, NY		Jacqueline and James Durfee	Tiverton, RI
Julie Johannessen	Brinston, ON		Laurie James	Sherwood Park, AB
Gordon Dyck	Lower Nicola, BC		Douglas Duval & Derek Moore	Grand Bay, AL
Michael Hester	Camden, SC		Michael Scantlebury	Grand Rapids, MI
Boedy and Irene Pennington	Atlanta, GA		Fred McLaughlin	Willcox, AZ
Nicholas Joseph Harrington	Westmeath, ON		Tina Michell	Surgoinsville, TN
Kathy Gordon	California, MD		Sarah Elhoffer	Carrollton, IL

BBSAI NEWSLETTER

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