

BBSAI Blog

July 2023

1) American Blackbelly Open Registration

As reported earlier in the Blog, the BBSAI is planning to go “live” with the American Blackbelly (AB) sheep open registration process soon. This will allow unregistered, qualified, AB sheep to be entered into the registration book. The process will be open only to BBSAI members in good standing.

For a sheep to qualify, it must:

- Have one registered AB parent
- Meet all current BBSAI AB Breed Standards
- Produce qualified offspring when mated with a registered AB (1 generation progeny testing)

The procedure will consist of:

- Submittal of an application with 4 photos of the candidate sheep
 - Review by the AB Open Registration committee (ABORC) for acceptance
- Submittal of progeny testing data and 4 photos of each lamb
 - Review by the ABORC for acceptance

If you have sheep that you would like to submit, you can start preparing now by collecting the data and photographs that will be needed. Details of the process and sample application and progeny testing forms are available by contacting the ABORC at: abopenreg@blackbellysheep.org. So, if you have spring lambs from a registered AB x unregistered AB and are interested in having the unregistered parent registered, you can get the data photographs before the lambs are sold!

2) BBSAI Membership Outreach Survey

The electronic member outreach survey closed on June 1 with 91 surveys being returned (63%). Thanks to everyone that responded. Here are some *preliminary* results.

What is the number one benefit members see in belonging to BBSAI? Survey says.....

Belonging to an organization dedicated to preserving and promoting the AB and BB sheep breeds AND ability to register sheep with known pedigree were tied for first place at 92%.

What member benefits would you like to see added? Survey says.....

BBSAI YouTube channel 59%, on-line annual elections 53%, and Zoom style meetings and webinars 48%.

How to address errant Registry data and Transfers not being filed? Survey says.....

Start on-line transfers 86% and require annual flock update 58%.

Are flock sizes increasing? Survey says... 62% - Yes and 38% - No

By the numbers..... Members reported the following flock data:

Registered AB = 374

Registered BB = 732

Unregistered AB = 178

Unregistered BB = 353

Registerable AB lambs born = 412

Registerable BB lambs born = 527

A more thorough data analysis and complete report is available for you to read at your leisure. Log in to the Members area at www.blackbellysheep.org and look for the link to the survey results.

3) A generous member has volunteered to share with all of us his use of a data recording system for his entire flock he has developed using the available service through Air Table. Air Table has a free service as well as several levels of paid service starting at \$10 per month. If you are on the BBSAI groups io email forum, you can see the discussion and view his video about his program. Here is the information about the zoom presentation for this opportunity:

You are invited to a Zoom meeting.

When: **Jul 18, 2023 06:15 PM Central Time (US and Canada)**

Register in advance for this meeting:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZUrd-qprzloHNT70XOsQLBp73tw8JmUiss0>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

4) If you have not yet renewed your annual BBSAI membership, it is not too late! Contact our membership secretary Sandy at secretary@blackbellysheep.org

5) **Get Acquainted: Bonny McKay and Dale Lucey in Manitoba, Canada**

I began raising American Blackbelly sheep in 2015. My husband and I had retired and moved down from Northern Manitoba to get back to my husband's farming roots. We purchased a beautiful century homestead in the foothills of Riding Mountain National Park but sadly the fields and farm had been neglected and were overgrown with burdock and scrub brush. We spent most of our time repairing, replacing fencing and researching the best breed of sheep to help us rehab our fields. We decided Blackbelly sheep sounded like the best fit for our small farm but finding any proved difficult. Our initial flock was a mixed bag of hair and wool breeds and it was a good learning experience. Late in 2014, I finally found and purchased an oddball starter flock of 2 bred ewes and three rams and took delivery in early 2015.

From those first few American Blackbelly sheep, our flock grew into our flock of today. Our first sheep were not registered and through the help of Carol Elkins and the rest of the board of BBSAI, we obtained registrations for our sheep and began our journey. Our hay fields make up the bulk of our small farm so we limit ourselves to a small flock of 15 to 20 ewes and 3 breeding rams plus prospect yearling ewes and rams and of course lambs.

We keep our rams together in a bachelor flock for most of the year, away from our ewes until breeding season. In December, we split them up and move each to his own pasture with his group of ewes. I select our breeding animals based on how closely they match the breed standard, a job that is easier thanks to the work of the AB breed standard committee of last year. All our animals are judged on a scale of their reproductive abilities, thriftiness and ease of handling. Breeding flocks stay together for 6-8 weeks. We tend to breed later than some because we time lambing to coincide with our pastures greening up. We are in a northern location so we often don't have any fresh grazing until mid-May.

When lambing is imminent, we move the ewe over from the ewe paddock to a small paddock adjoining our lambing barn. Not to say we don't get the odd sneaky lady who prefers to lamb on her own on the pasture but we prefer to have them lamb in a jug in the barn. It reduces the risk of drawing in predators plus makes our guardian dogs job easier. After lambing, we weigh, give a vitamin and mineral supplement and tag the lambs. They stay in the jug with mama for two or three days then back out on the grass in the small paddock



during the day and jug at night. At ten days, ewe and lambs rejoin the ewe flock on pasture.

Our hay fields produce a Timothy, Alfalfa, Brome mixture that on a normal year tests as 12% protein. We always give all our sheep access to free choice 2:1 loose minerals and salt blocks, plus our ewes have lick tubs of molasses base mineral. I think a lot of pregnancy and lamb problems can be averted if a sheep has adequate mineral intake. We freshen our ewes with a 50/50 blend of whole oats and whole barley and also finish our market lambs with the same.

Our flock's ease of handling means we don't have crowding tubs or a lot of handling equipment etc. but we do have some alleyways and chutes to move and sort sheep. The easier it is for both the sheep and us, the better we all enjoy the experience. We always encourage any prospective buyer to visit our farm and view the sheep and our set up to give them an idea of what is required but we always stress there are many different ways to raise sheep and our way is born out of necessity and the location of our paddocks and barn. We made mistakes and learned from them but there is always more to learn.

Our lambing barn is located close to the house and we tend to keep young or vulnerable animals close in to reduce predator risk. We have been asked in the past to provide grazing weed control for the nature reserves that border our land but that tends to require a full time shepherd and at least two of our dogs to maintain flock security. We can attest to the fact that our AB sheep have zero respect for any of the temporary electric fencing like Electronet and generally will blast right through electric fencing if they feel they must.

We try to maintain a working pack of four adult LGD on our farm at all times due to the heavy predator load. We only use purpose-bred dogs from proven working parents. We tend to prefer Maremmas for use with our ewes and lambs and use Kuvaszok (imported Serbian bloodlines) for ram lambs and perimeter patrol but there is always some flex. We couple that with good farming practices that reduce predator risk and were selected by the MB Beef Association/ MB Sheep Association to receive and test new (to Manitoba) predator risk reduction equipment in 2022. We tested both the Turbo Fladry Wire system and the Solar Fox Lights and found both to be a very helpful addition if used correctly but in my humble opinion, our dogs are the biggest deterrent to predators and frankly we wouldn't be able to raise sheep without them.



Our sheep are outside all year round except for lambing. Our paddocks have three sided shelters and straw bedding in the winter but the sheep only use them in the most extreme of weather. They grow a heavy coat for the winter. For vaccinations and worming, we use Tasvax 8-way and we vary our wormers between Valbazen and Ivermectin/Safeguard.

We worm usually twice a year but do fecal testing to check how our program is doing and if worming is necessary. We practice rotational grazing and I believe that helps keep our sheep healthy but I don't believe our breed is maintenance free. Our pregnant ewes and lambs also get a vitamin A/D/selenium drench just before and after birth.

I don't think we deal with any particular weather event that is specific to our area. Heavy snow and or extreme cold makes care for our flock more difficult and increases our feed costs significantly but our sheep are adapted to deal with both. They grow a heavy coat and are on the larger end of the AB standard so they have more mass to deal with the cold. Two winters ago we had an extremely heavy snow load with the general level (not drifts) of snow covering the tops of our 49" field fences which allowed our sheep to go "walkabout" on a regular basis. After ploughing snow every day to get to sheep, feed bunks and hay bales, and in one notable case, me wading through waist deep snow to break trail for a stranded ram who decided midnight in a howling blizzard was an excellent time to go for a stroll, Spring was very welcome. The only concession we make to winter weather is if a multi-day blizzard with heavy snow and cold temperatures sets in. We usually put the bred ewes in the lambing barn for a rest until the storm blows over.

I guess what makes us unique is that we were the only breeder of registered AB sheep in Manitoba and Saskatchewan for a few years. I am happy to say that we have sold starter flocks in both those provinces and other parts of Canada and encouraged our buyers to register as a breeder and to continue to register any sheep they raise. I have been fortunate to have an experienced shepherd as a mentor and I try to pay that forward. I feel mentoring and offering both pre-sale and after sale help to our buyers is a big part of being a good representative for our breed. Due to the small numbers of Canadian Breeders of both AB and BB sheep, it is important to have a link to information and to create a community that allows us to share concerns and information.

What makes our sheep unique is their very calm, friendly nature coupled with their quality. We work with our flock every day and have established a routine that gives them the stability and security so they react calmly when you move them or pen them to give vaccinations etc. They are still AB and will be flighty if they feel the need to get back to their roots but their first response is always "Hi, how are you?" Although we do have one old girl, who despite living her entire life here on the farm and being treated with courtesy and



respect, still looks at us as though we are about to steal her oats or make unreasonable demands on her time.



Although we know every animal in our flock on a first name basis, they are not pets. Ours is a working flock that is managed as livestock. Maintaining quality in our breeding program boils down to a simple rule. Breed the best and eat the rest. In closing, I think both Blackbelly breeds are quite simply the most versatile and beautiful breed of sheep there is and I feel privileged to own and care for my flock.