

WINTER 2024 BBSAI NEWSLETTER/BLOG



BBSAI 2023 ANNUAL ELECTION RESULTS

The BBSAI By-Laws require that balloting results be made available to the membership promptly (Article V.G.2). We received 35 e-ballots, and 7 paper mail-in ballots, a total of 42. This represents a 31% response rate (42 returned from 135 eligible voters to whom ballots were sent). These ballots have been tallied and your seven 2024 BBSAI Board of Directors are:

John Carlton, AL

Elaine Haas, MO

Pam Hand, VA

Sandy Hession, MA

Courtney Irwin, SK

Constance (Bru) Katzenbach, NJ

Israel Villacorta, TX.

Their contact information is listed on the website. Please stay in touch with us so that we can better assist you.

This year the Communications, Governance and Website committees have many interesting and rewarding volunteer opportunities for members. For more information, contact Bru Katzenbach: recordingsecretary@blackbellysheep.org

Our first trip to Barbados, by Pam Hand



Photos which show the striking dark brown and black coloration of the sheep at Greenland Station:
<https://photos.app.goo.gl/3scrsewstfufbsWg6>

My husband Will Hueston and I spent one week in Barbados in November 2023. Our aim was to see and learn about the Barbados Blackbelly sheep there. We were fortunate to meet John Vaughan, the retired director of the government breeding facility (Greenland) as well as two members of the sheep association (which has about 70 members). We plan to return in February for 10 days to meet even more people (and see more sheep) since we hope to attend the annual sheep show there. We are very concerned about the current situation with the Barbados Blackbelly sheep there for a number of reasons listed below.

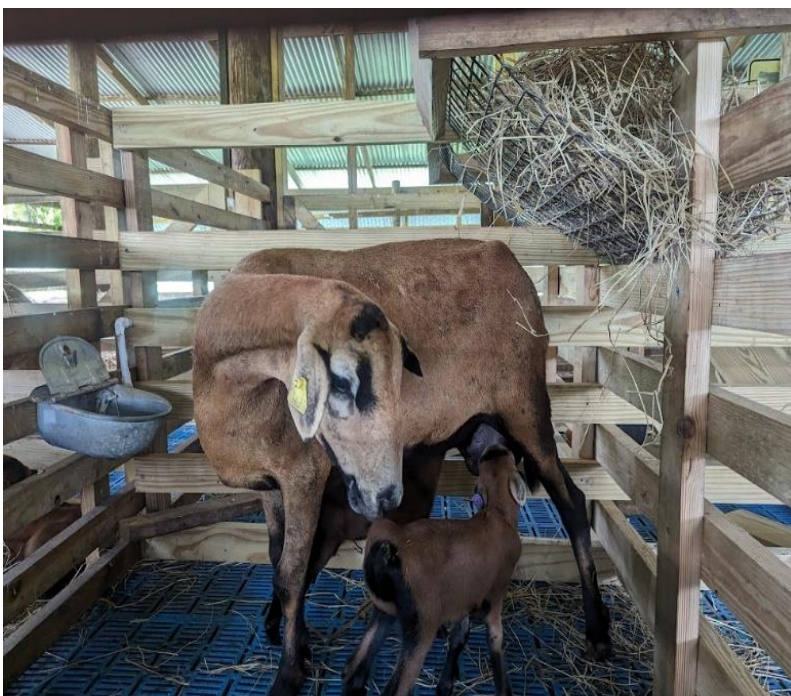
Basically there is a lot of crossbreeding happening on Barbados with no organized animal identification program. Sheep thefts appear to be rampant (even from government facilities). The government breeding facility only has 480 remaining sheep, and that flock is now infected with what appears to be caseous lymphadenitis, nasal bots, and an as yet undiagnosed condition causing blindness in older ewes. Covid devastated the economy which is based on tourism. Volcanic ash from the eruption on nearby St. Vincent covered Barbados with ash in 2021 which killed a lot of lambs. Feed costs have risen and the quality of the imported food has declined. There has been no sheep census since the 1980's and estimates we heard varied from 4,000 to 10,000 but with no idea about how many might still be purebred Barbados Blackbelly. While sheep have been exported in the past from Barbados, right now there does not appear to be any active program to export either animals or germplasm anywhere except to Guyana where 750 out of a promised 1000 went in 2023. There is no known rescue flock anywhere in the world that could recreate the breed on Barbados in the event of a calamity. The current US flock

numbers about 1100 and these animals are more representative of sheep exported many years ago. And as we know there was extensive cross breeding here which continues to result in disqualified offspring from registered BB parents.

Will and I are in the process of forming a committee of concerned individuals from around the world to preserve and promote the Barbados Blackbelly sheep, and to expand existing populations. We hope to collect information of the current status on Barbados perhaps with an informal survey during the sheep show in February; to find and contact owners of flocks in the Caribbean, Mexico, Malaysia and elsewhere; meet with officials in agriculture and government on Barbados to discuss possible export of animals and germplasm to set up and improve rescue flocks; and to set the stage for eventual importation of sheep or more likely semen to the US. We will also try to recruit The Livestock Conservancy to be our partners and guide in this mission.

If you would like to see our photos from the Greenland Station Barbados Government breeding station, use these links:

Buildings and facilities: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/9bkJMJC7R3SGcm3f6>



Elevated lambing jugs:
<https://photos.app.goo.gl/KqgB34QJifREx3vcA>

Rams are kept in small individual pens: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/ULgtTYCjS5wKgRmm6>



Ideal length of tail and black color of scrotum:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/MW7hhdAXKee2bzmW9>



A single breeding ram, with up to 80 ewes for 42 days: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/Z4cx6dUTTKy1epZe9>



If you'd like to see a video of what the volcanic ash on Barbados was like, copy and paste this into your browser: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfoW9NFTNo>

If you would like to see a 2019 interview with John Vaughan, the director of Greenland, who shows the milking goats, meat rabbits and Barbados Blackbelly sheep breeding program there, use this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMXyVcMHbiY>

Here is an outline of the selection criteria at Greenland and the management of the BBS flock:

Greenland Barbados Blackbelly sheep breeding station

- As of December 2023 there are 480 sheep.
- No breeding was done for the last 2 years due to CL presumptively identified in the flock. Has been recently restarted, with 100 ewes being bred right now.
- All sheep are identified with ear tags and records are kept of pedigrees and various health measurements like birth weight, weaning weight, 6 months wt., number of lambs, etc.
- There is a herd of milking goats at the station now as well as the sheep.
- There was a rabbit breeding program at the station but that has been abandoned.

Selection criteria

- Uniform dark brown coloration
- Black belly and facial bars
- Black muzzle with 'clean face' (not a lot of black except for bars and muzzle)
- Polled rams with prominent Roman nose
- No white markings anywhere, except for older rams occasional faint white saddle
- Black scrotal sack, no split scrotum
- No toggles
- Tail down to the hock and uniformly brown, no white tip
- 60/40 rule (more height between top of back and bottom of chest than from bottom of chest to ground)
- Ears can point straight out to the side, forward or down
- Wide between legs right to left (broad chest and pelvis)
- No cow hocks

- Ewe can have single first time but afterwards only twins or more
- Sheep with low FECs are prioritized

Breeding and management

- Single ram put in with as many as 80 ewes for 45 days
 - Ewe lambs bred no earlier than 9 months of age and at least 90-100 pounds
 - Ram lambs are not bred until they are at least 1.5 years old, up until 10-11 years.
 - Ewes bred 3x every 2 years
 - Lamb mortality for first time ewes is 20%; afterwards about 7%
 - Lambs at birth are tagged, weighed and navels dipped
 - Raised jugs used for first week or so
 - Ewe/Lamb families grouped by number in litter so fed more for more lambs (trips or quads)
 - Creep feed for lambs started at 2 weeks of age (ideally 20% protein)
 - Lambs weaned at 8 weeks, fed 16% protein
 - All lambs are given amprolium and fenbendazole at weaning.
 - Lambs fed 14% protein for finishing, aim for slaughter at 100 pounds at 6 months of age
 - Do see some clinical tetanus but no vaccines given to any sheep
 - Orf occasionally seen, usually only in lambs
 - Presumptive CL seen in flock, culling clinical cases
- Blindness of unknown etiology seen in some older sheep which are being culled (sheep are paradoxically otherwise normal)



Get Acquainted: Penner Mini Farms

By Jeffrey Penner

My wife and I started raising American Blackbelly sheep in June 2022 when we got our first three ewes from a BBSAI breeder in Minnesota. We instantly fell in love with this breed of sheep, and we knew that we were all in on establishing a small flock of American Blackbelly sheep in Nebraska and raising awareness of these amazing and beautiful sheep. We were one of the first BBSAI registered breeders for American Blackbelly sheep in Nebraska. Because of this we had to try and find breeders in neighboring states to help us get established. In 2022, my wife and I traveled to Minnesota and Tennessee to find ewes and a ram to get started. As our flock is starting to grow, we have connected with another breeder in Oklahoma and plan on getting a 2nd breeding ram in 2024 to introduce another bloodline into our flock and breeding program.

We didn't start our little farm with American Blackbelly sheep. Our little farm, Penner Mini Farms, located near Lincoln, Nebraska was established when my parents gifted us with a miniature donkey in the Spring of 2020. We decided he needed a friend and so we purchased a couple of miniature horses (a mare and a stallion) that summer. We really didn't have much of a plan at that time. We both just love animals and we had decided that we wanted to find an acreage and establish a small farm. My parents invited us to build a house on their farm so we could live close to them and so we started the process of building our new farm and Penner Mini Farms was established. Our desire was to start a miniature farm where we would raise miniature animals of all kinds. We started with horses and our donkey, but we really wanted to add some miniature goats and sheep to our farm as well.

By the Summer of 2021 we added a few goats and a few varieties of wool sheep to our farm. We did not know anything about raising goats and sheep but we are always eager to learn and so we started doing lots of research and just learned as much as we could as we went. Initially we were more interested in goats than sheep and so we focused on increasing our flock of goats. We currently have 17 goats. We raise Nigerian Dwarf, LaMancha and Miniature Lamancha goats. We have a small milking parlor set up in our barn and we milk our goats, selling the raw milk and making goat milk soaps.





Sheep were more of a challenge for us at first as the breeds we had were more flighty and just more difficult for us to manage. I quickly learned that I do not have the skills required to shear wool sheep (and I can tell you that the sheep would whole-heartedly agree). My wife and I are quick learners, and we are always willing to jump in and try things we have never done before (such as trimming hooves, ear tagging, banding kids and lambs, vaccinating, and pretty much everything related to the care of sheep and goats). So, when it was time for the sheep to be sheared, we purchased a good set of shears, and we watched a few YouTube videos (looked easy enough) and we grabbed the first sheep we could catch and shearing began (if you could even call what I did shearing). My experience that day shearing sheep was nothing like the YouTube videos we watched. My shearing attempt more closely resembles something like a wrestling match with a set of shears. When I was done shearing our sheep my wife commented that our sheep “looked like a bunch of peeled potatoes.” That day, I realized that wool sheep were not something that I wanted to raise. (We still have a few wool sheep on the farm but those are my dad’s sheep and I no longer do the shearing.)

However, I had heard about hair sheep and so I got on my computer and started researching hair sheep and all the different hair sheep breeds. As soon as I discovered the American Blackbelly sheep, I told my wife that I wanted to try to find some American Blackbelly sheep and get a few to see how we liked them. When I read that they are fairly low maintenance, no shearing required, social, hardy and good foragers I just knew these were the sheep for us. The “icing on top of the cake” for me though was how beautiful and majestic these sheep are (especially the rams). So, as I stated before, we had to drive all the way up to Minnesota (that was the closest breeder to us at the time) to pick up our first 3 ewes in June 2022 and from that moment on we have absolutely loved our American Blackbelly sheep. It was love at first sight and love for them every day after.



All our American Blackbelly sheep (ewes, ram, and lambs) absolutely love interacting with people. They love when we come to the fence or come into the barn and interact with them. They all come running up to the fence and will even climb up on the fence to get as close to us as possible. My wife and I spend lots of time each week in their pen giving them lots of cuddles and hugs. My wife asked me one day a while back, "If we could only have one kind of animal and had to get rid of the rest of our animals, which animals would you keep?" I quickly answered and said that I would keep the American Blackbelly sheep. She asked why and I told her that Leilani (one of our ewes) is the sweetest animal I have ever experienced in all my life. There is no way I would want to part with her or any of the other sheep we have. It is as if they were made perfectly for our little farm.

My wife and I are still in the process of building and developing our farm. So, we do not have pastures fenced off yet for our goats and American Blackbelly sheep. This last summer (2023) we finally got a few acres of pasture fenced off for our Ram and our boy sheep. However, all our ewes and goats are currently on dry lots (paddocks). We feed our American Blackbelly sheep good grass hay that we produce on our farm. Our hay has a lot of legumes mixed in with the grass. We have lots of clover, birdsfoot trefoil, alfalfa, and a mixture of different kinds of grasses in our hay fields and our sheep love it. We also discovered this fall that the American Blackbelly sheep love sunflowers so we picked sunflowers and other plants and would feed them as treats.



We give all of our goats and sheep free minerals. I have made mineral feeders out of 4" PVC pipes and have installed those in our barn so that our sheep and goats always have access to clean and dry minerals.



I have also built all our hay feeders for our sheep. I have found it works better to make the hay feeders than buy them because I can make sure to make them at the proper height for our sheep. I get my plans from Premier 1 Supplies but then I modify them so that they work best for our animals.

We currently just breed one time a year in November and December so that we have late Spring lambs. Here in Nebraska the winters are brutally cold. Winter 2023 we had -40-degree wind chills for a two week stretch. The American Blackbelly sheep and our miniature horses endured that cold weather like champs. Our American Blackbelly sheep must put up with harsh winters and extremely hot summers. We have not had any issues with them with our extreme Nebraska weather. We have shelters for them to get out of the weather as needed and we have good fencing to protect them from predators. However, because of all of these factors we want to make sure that our lambs have the best possible start, so we want to avoid the extreme cold or hot for lambing here in Nebraska. We keep our ewes in our big barn (with adequate fenced off pens outside the barn) when they are lambing and provide them with a clean, dry and warm area to lamb.



At Penner Mini Farms, we are focusing on raising chickens and selling farm fresh eggs, raising dairy goats and selling milk and milk products, and raising American Blackbelly sheep for meat as well as for selling lambs for others to begin their flocks with great stock. We strive to provide the best possible care for our animals and to give our animals good, safe and clean-living environments. We are visionaries as well, constantly looking for ways to improve our farm and how we care for our animals. We are also always looking for sustainable ways to grow our farm and expand. Last summer because of the extreme drought here in Nebraska my dad sold all his Angus cattle.

This past Fall (2023), my wife and I once again started to research cattle breeds that would be a great fit for our farm. We discovered Pinewoods Cattle. In the Spring of 2024, we are going to start a small herd of Pinewoods cattle to raise for beef. Once again, we will be one of the first (maybe even the first) registered breeders of Pinewood's cattle in Nebraska. These are cattle with a lot of history and there is a lot of conservation efforts going on to protect this breed of cattle and we are excited to join in the effort and do our part as well.

My wife and I both work full-time at our church in Lincoln, Nebraska. I graduated from college with a degree in Computer Science and am a computer programmer and database administrator. I also try to bring my experience and skills in computer programming and database design to our farm operations. I have designed several software systems to help my wife and I with our farming operations so that we can continue to scale our farm operations without adding a lot of extra work. I have developed an Inventory and Order Management System for handling the sales of all our eggs, products, services and animals. I have also developed an Animal Management system for tracking all the information and data regarding each and every one of our animals. I love incorporating my experience and skills in technology with my growing experience with farming.



Penner Mini Farms

<https://www.pennerminifarms.com/>



All Photos Courtesy of Jeffrey and Lo Penner, Penner Mini Farm