

# Black Welsh Mountain Sheep Club Newsletter November 1998

## Are Black Welsh a Primitive Breed?

OK this is a topic for discussion, I'll give some definitions, as I understand them and my own personal views but want to open up discussion from other breeders.

What is the difference between primitive, industrial and standard breeds? In general, the majority of rare breeds tend to be more primitive. If they weren't they would be common since they would have characteristics that are commercially important. But there are rare breeds which in my opinion are not truly primitive. How do we account for these breeds?

Based on discussions I've had with breeders of various species of animals and directors and officers of the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy I've defined the major classifications this way. This is my own view and is subject to revision and discussion.

**Primitive:** Primitive breeds have developed with minimal human selection pressure. They typically possess lots of genetic variation between members but share certain characteristics indicative of a breed. A primitive breed will typically retain survival characteristics that favor production with minimal human inputs. Consistency among the products produced by the breed is somewhat lacking but they are an important source of genetic variation that may not exist anywhere else. Good examples of primitive breeds of sheep include Shetland, Navajo Churro and Jacob.

**Industrial:** Industrial breeds have been highly selected for specific characteristics. They are typically very uniform across the breed with minimal genetic variation. Industrial production characteristics that require high human input levels have been selected for while production and survivability characteristics that don't require human inputs have been selected against. In many cases a single characteristic has been the only selection criteria. A good example of an industrial breed is the current modern Suffolk.

Most people agree on the above definitions. But I feel there is a third classification that needs to be recognized. I have called this Standardized.

**Standardized:** Standardized animals are typically those which are multi-purpose and possess characteristics that make them suitable

for several uses. They are generally fairly uniform within the breed but some significant differences do occur between individuals and bloodlines. Many standardized breeds are highly adapted for minimal human input while retaining consistency in their products. A standard breed may have had significant selection pressure but it is typically for several important characteristics not only one or two.

I would argue that Black Welsh are a standard breed not a primitive one. In the breed standard from England it is mentioned that the breed has been selected for over 100 years. There were a number of characteristics that were considered important criteria including a good tasty carcass with a high cutting ratio, a strong medium wool that is exclusively black with no kemp and many survivability characteristics including easy lambing, good foragers and high productivity. If you look at the pictures of the show animals in England you see a very uniform set of animals. I have pictures of flocks in England where all the animals look very similar. There is little variation in wool color, type or carcass quality among purebred animals. There is some variation among British flocks regarding twinning rates but no huge differences.

Does this really matter? Well I think that in the long run our sheep are going to have to compete against all other sheep breeds. A standardized breed where we can offer a consistent product may have an advantage over more primitive breeds where consistency between the breed is hard to find. Primitive breeds have an important place in the global flock but their value must capitalize on their unique characteristics. Our Black Welsh Mountain have many characteristics that make them ideally suited to compete in a commercial environment against other Industrial breeds. I personally feel that by maintaining consistency and quality we can promote these sheep to do the job they were designed to do. I'd love to hear your thoughts so write or call or e-mail me and we'll add them to the next newsletter.

## OPP and Scrapie Testing

We have tested our entire flock for OPP and also for their status at Codon 171.

OPP is Ovine Progressive Pneumonia. It is an infectious disease that is caused by the same organism that causes CAE in goats. OPP infected sheep have reduced vigor, raise small

and weak lambs and eventually succumb to the lung deficit.

Our flock tested negative for OPP. Since OPP has a long timespan between infection and testing positive we will continue to test a portion of our flock each year as suggested by the OPP Sheep Breeders guidelines.

I would encourage all Black Welsh Mountain Sheep breeders to consider testing their flocks. Having a large population that is negative will facilitate transfer of animals between flocks and will aid in promoting Black Welsh for use in crossbred programs for the production of meat and pelts.

Our second major testing was done for Codon 171. Codon 171 appears to be the controlling locus that determines whether a particular sheep will get infected with scrapie if exposed. The other codons that are involved determine what strains of scrapie the animal is susceptible to and how soon after infection symptoms will appear.

The bad news is that our entire flock is QQ at codon 171. This means that they are all susceptible to scrapie. As part of our breeding plans we are looking at finding animals that are QR or RR and incorporating them into our flock. RR is a fully resistant animal while QR is also resistant but can produce susceptible sheep.

To date we have paid for testing of 7 additional animals. Most were QQ but we did find one ram and two ewes who are QR and have purchased them and their untested daughters.

Our testing was done at:

GeneCheck  
1629 Blue Spruce Drive Suite 106  
Ft. Collins, CO 80524

The cost for testing of codon 171 is \$25.00 each for 1-4 samples, \$20.00 each for 5-100 samples and \$18.00 each for over 100 samples. The samples need to be a small amount of blood in a purple top EDTA tube. If you wish to test your own flocks be sure you use a separate tube and needle to collect each sample as any cross contamination will invalidate the results.

In addition to testing our animals I have also arranged for the testing of the UK rams whose semen has been imported. This is costing me an additional \$214.00. I am asking for contributions from other breeders who have purchased imported semen to help defray the cost. In the long run knowing what these rams have

genetically will be important to how we use the semen in our US flocks.

I have also talked to Elite Genetics and in future if additional rams are collected the testing will be done prior to selection of the rams for semen collection.

## **Federal Scrapie Program**

With the move of my sheep from Colorado to California I had to put on hold my entry into the Federal scrapie program since it is administered by each state. Now that they are all in one state I have applied to the program. I have been assigned a flock ID and am in the process of tattooing all my animals and getting the initial inspection performed.

Fortunately the new rules allow for the inclusion and purchase of animals into enrolled flocks without significant penalty. These new rules will allow us to remain in the scrapie program yet still share animals as required to preserve genetic diversity and promote better variation among the purebred population.

## **Registry Issues**

The October meeting of the Black Welsh Mountain Society in England discussed the US registry and issues surrounding the semen importation. I have not heard what the results were. I have sent another letter asking for their guidance.

Most of us received a survey from the US registry. I have not heard anything about the results of that survey nor had any other contact with the US registry. I would appreciate hearing from anyone who has gotten any new information.

## **New Breed Club**

There is a group of people in the process of forming a Club to promote and support Black Welsh Mountain Sheep breeders. For more information on the status please contact Luke Vaughn who is listed in the breeders directory. My understanding is that he will be sending proposed bylaws and asking for memberships in December.

## **Marketing Ideas**

I've been working to market my wool and lambs and want to share some things I have done. I took Black Welsh, Shetland and Cotswold roving to a local knitting and spinning group and

presented the breeds. I was amazed at how people who work with fiber have little or no understanding of the breed differences that made the fibers different. Many of the people had no idea that the varying feel of the wool they spin is a result of the differences between the breeds of sheep. My short presentation with the breed fibers was the first time anyone had talked to them about breed differences.

As a direct result of my experiences I have arranged for a group of three local breeders to host an open barn tour in December to share our different breeds with these people. Between us we can present 7 different breeds of sheep all with very different wool types.

I would encourage you to get in contact with the spinning and knitting groups in your area and arrange a presentation. You might find that you can educate potential customers about the features of the various fibers. As a result of my presentation I have pre-sold 2 fleeces for next year.

Meat is another major product of Black Welsh Sheep. While many local breeders sell market lambs to individuals I have been exploring what it takes to sell directly to restaurants. Unfortunately it is required that the animals be killed in a USDA inspected slaughterhouse. The closest one licensed for sheep is in Fresno, about 8 hours drive away. I am talking to local butchers to try to persuade one to become USDA licensed and open up this market to us. If you have a local USDA facility this might be a good market for you.

## **Breed Standard**

If you did not get a copy of the UK breed standard and want one please call or write and I'll mail you a copy.

## **Showing Sheep**

I am trying to get it approved to show Black Welsh Mountain Sheep in California without first registering them as Natural Colored. No progress yet, I'm still in the throes of finding out who I need to talk to get it allowed. I'd appreciate hearing from anyone who has shown Black Welsh at fairs in other states. If you have any specific information on the requirements and how to get it approved please let me know.

## **Pedigree Data**

I received a whole lot of pedigree data from Mary Mondello and Patty Spor. I am in the process of figuring out how to present this data to everyone. If you have any suggestions let me know.

I was able to trace my British registered ewes directly to Mr. Wyman's flock by cross referencing what I already had with the extended pedigrees I received from Mary and Patty. Thanks for providing the additional information and I hope to be able to share it with you all soon.

## **Editors Notes**

The Black Welsh and Shetland sheep have finally arrived in California after a horrid trip including being stuck in a blizzard for 21 hours. They are settling in nicely and doing well. We are putting rams in this month for late lambs next year but better late than never.

In other news we have another new ram and 7 more ewes which arrived this weekend.

That's it for now, take care and please, SEND ME STUFF FOR THE NEWSLETTER!

Oogie McGuire

## Breeders Listing

If you sell animals please let me know so I can add the new owners to the breeders listing and send them a newsletter. Also please send me updates to your stock so we can know who has what and what's for sale.

<p><b>Brindle Hill Farm</b> Mr. James Warren Mr. Kevin Barnhart P.O. Box 306 St. Thomas, PA 17252 (717) 369-3275 11 Ewes NFS 1 Ewe Lamb NFS 2 Rams NFS <b>2 Ram Lambs \$250.00 each</b></p>	<p><b>Desert Weyr</b> Ken and Oogie McGuire 551 Gem Lane Ramona, CA 92065-3770 (760) 788-6671 oogiem@dsrtweyr.com 15 Ewes NFS 2 Ewe Lambs NFS 1 Ram NFS 1 Yearling Ram on loan from Mary Mondello</p>
<p><b>High Desert Primitives</b> Patty Spor P. O. Box 3031 Princeton, OR 97721 (541) 493-2628 <b>6 Ewes call for prices</b> <b>5 Rams call for prices</b></p>	<p><b>Jack and Lorna Kearney</b> 6691 Westcott Road Duncan, BC V9L 3W8  <b>I need data on what you have and any animals for sale.</b></p>
<p><b>Mondello Miniature Ranch</b> Mrs. Mary Mondello 3110 Vineyard Canyon Road San Miguel, CA 93451 (805) 467-3206 21 Ewes NFS 4 Rams NFS <b>4 Ram Lambs some for sale call for prices</b> <b>12 Ewe Lambs some for sale call for prices</b></p>	<p><b>Deb Moore</b> 24828 4th Avenue NW Stanwood WA 98292 <b>? Ewes call for prices</b> <b>? Rams call for prices</b>  <b>The phone number I have has been disconnected. Deb, Please call or write and let me know where you are and what is still for sale.</b></p>
<p><b>Perigord Farmstead</b> Mr. Luke Vaughn Mr. Eric Edelstein 1120 Valley Road Mason, NH 03048 (603) 878-1195 2 Ewes NFS 1 Ewe Lamb NFS</p>	<p><b>Smith Farm Black Welsh Mountain Sheep</b> Sally and Basil Smith 7650 Sandy Farm Road Severn, MD 21144 (410) 766-0879 <b>37 Ewes and Ewe Lambs some for sale</b> <b>3 Proven Rams \$400.00 each</b> <b>4 Young Rams \$250.00 each</b> <b>10 Ram Lambs \$175.00</b></p>
<p><b>Gerard and Sandra Zurawski</b> 2005 School Road San Juan Bautista, CA 95045 3 Ewes NFS 1 Ram NFS</p>	