

A GUIDE FOR SHEEP AND FARM LIFE

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Sheep Producers Pass Industry Checkoff

Only 500 More To Go

Urinary Calculi—Pay Attention to Your Lamb Ration

Possibilities and Pitfalls of Pasture Lambing

A New Lease on Life

"Whitening" the Coloured Sheep

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What is wrong with coloured sheep? The growth is the same, the meat is the same, but while wool is coloured, it still has a value and a use in spinning and natural-coloured garments. So why do people take the pain and make the effort to change the natural colour of sheep to white? I was surprised when one breeder involved in crossbreeding with the Romanov told me that his clients pay him less for his lambs if the animals are coloured. I haven't found anybody cooking his lambs with the pelts still on! So why the discrimination against coloured lambs? I wondered and am still wondering. I am aware of two cases where scientists made a great effort to eliminate colour from a breed of sheep. The first was in Australia and the breed was the Suffolk.

The White Suffolk

There is not much known about this "White Suffolk." I got the information from a short paper published in *Wool Technology and Sheep Breeding* back in 1987. The development of this breed took place at the University of New South Wales in Australia. And again the sole purpose of its development rested on the fact that Suffolk-sired lambs, though they excelled in growth rate and produced desirable carcasses, carried black wool fibres. The White Suffolk was developed after an intense selection and breeding program using genes from both Suffolk and Polled Dorset breeds. After establishing and fixing the colour of the new breed, the university sold its entire experimental flock to a private company formed to act as a trustee company for the White Suffolk Trust. The company consisting of 40 breeder members continues with the cooperative breeding program, selecting for growth rate and leanness and breeding flock rams for the prime lamb industry in general. The five main selection objectives of the White Suffolk Terminal Sire breed are: ease of lambing, bare heads and legs, carcass leanness, growth rate, and serving capacity of sires.

The White Romanov

The White Romanov or the "White Russians" as they are frequently referred to were developed in Alberta at the Lethbridge Station of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. The development

started in 1987 from a first cross between Romanov and Romnelet sheep. First cross animals were continuously back-crossed to Romanov until 1990. Then a foundation flock of 45 predominantly white ewes and rams with $\frac{1}{8}$ or more Romanov blood were selected from a larger population with various degrees of colouring. Since 1990, these White Romanovs were interbred with all replacements having to meet independent culling levels for reproduction and whiteness. Selection pressure against hairiness of the fleece was exerted only on the males because of the limited population size. After two generations of interbreeding, the proportion of lambs born non-white dropped to just below 25%. Because the grey colour is recessive to white, genes for the grey colour can remain undetected in the population. Changes in colour brought about some changes in fibre composition. Increasing number of lambs were born with fine, short crimped birth coats completely different from the usual long hairy birth coat of Romanov and Romanov crosses. So it seems that moving away from the coloured sheep brings about improvement in wool quality. The White Romanov flock of the Lethbridge station was recently sold to Mr. M. Veum, a sheep breeder in North Dakota, who intends to continue breeding these sheep to maintain the white colour.

Sources Of These White Breeds

I am sure that many breeders who like the attributes of the Suffolk and Romanov and dislike the intensive colouring in their progeny will find these new breeds interesting. To my best knowledge, there are no White Suffolks presently in North America and anyone interested could import them from Australia. The contact in Australia is Dr.

Jeff Eppleston, Orange Agricultural College, P.O. Box 883, Orange, NSW, 2800.

As for the White Romanov, the breed already exists in North America, and though the numbers are still small, with the remarkable reproductive ability of the Romanov breed, this situation can change in a short time. The present source of White Romanov is Mr. Maynard Veum, R.R. 2, Cando, ND 58224.

It is not clear the official situation of these new breeds for registration purposes. The White Suffolk will probably need to be registered apart from the traditional Suffolk breed assuming that the breed is presently recognized by the Australian authorities. As for the White Romanov variety, the new breed will need to be recognized by national authorities first.

Targhee Notes

The top ten 1995 registration recorders in the U.S. Targhee Sheep Association are as follows:

1. Innes Ranch, Gillette, WY	93
2. Ernest Knipfer, Mill Iron, MT	88
3. Judith Scanlan, Dayville, OR	88
4. McGee Ranch, Rhame, ND	85
5. Doug & Karla Turbiville, Mill Iron, MT	79
6. Sieben Live Stock Company, Helena, MT	74
7. Horse Butte Ranch, Two Dot, MT	61
8. Nancy MacLeod, Monroe, WI	60
9. MSU, Agriculture Experiment Station, Bozeman, MT	55
10. Greenwalt Family Targhees, St. Xavier, MT	54

Nick Isaacs of Keldron, South Dakota, was recently appointed as chairman of the U.S. Targhee Sheep Association Promotions Committee. Nick and his wife, Elaine, raise Targhee sheep and Angus and Polled Hereford cattle in Keldron, South Dakota. Nick believes in accurate record keeping, selection through reproductive and performance traits, and increasing the uniformity of the Targhee breed. Nick is assisted by fellow committee members Jan Gilger, Belle Fourche, South Dakota, and Richard Corrado, Greenwood, Nebraska, in promoting Targhees.

The Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival, May 3-5, 1996, will feature the Eastern Regional Targhee Sheep and Wool Show. Wes Limesand will evaluate the live sheep show. For further information, please contact the U.S. Targhee Sheep Association, P.O. Box 462, Jordan, MT 59337-0462, 406-557-2305.

