



Newsletter Fall 2019 Edition

The Ram not chosen

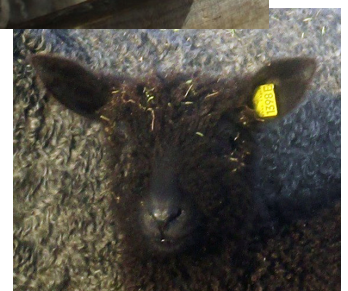
by Cory Simpson

My mom has always enjoyed music and poetry so some of that may have rubbed off on me over the years, but hopefully you'll find the metaphors applicable and memorable.

In any sheep we keep or buy we have to ask ourselves, does it have traits that will move us closer to where we want to be. Selecting livestock is much like looking for the perfect cherry blossom. It is a constant quest for perfection while recognizing the beauty of what we have. I often think of the poem "If wool be thy care" and the accompanying commentary on Pine Lane Farm's web page. <https://www.plfkarakuls.com/art-woolpoem.html> As Wensleydale breeders, the rams we choose can be the most important decision we make for our flock and should not be done in haste or to save on transport costs. Our ewes can only have so many lambs in their lifetimes. If we want to improve our stock and the breed as a whole, then each mating needs to have the potential to make better lambs than their parents. Depending on the genes both parents carry and pass on, some lambs will be better than their parents and others won't be as good.

When choosing a ram the first question I ask is, is it

true to type. If the answer is no, then it should not be used as a registered ram. It might be a nice sheep, but there are certain traits that should remove a ram from consideration right from the start. As lambs, Wensleydales can be born with lighter color ears that turn dark as they grow up. But as adults they should have dark ears and dark skin on the nose covered by white wool/fuzz. If they have pink ears as an adult I think we have to ask ourselves if it's even a Wensleydale. Another trait to consider when determining if it's true to type is the shape of the nose, ears and the wool on the back of the head. Wensleydales have a fairly distinctive look that is perhaps best shown in pictures. The ears should be medium sized and well set, pointed slightly up and forward but not up like a Border Leicester or hanging down like a Karakul. The nose should be straight and even, it should not be shaped like a roman nose on a Blue Faced Leicester or a dishpan nose like those on an Icelandic sheep or an Arabian horse. The four pictures below show good Wensleydale type.



NAWSA Annual Membership meeting will be on **November 18, 2019 8 pm Eastern, 7 pm Central, 6 pm Mountain, 5 pm Pacific**. It is held via Free Conference call.

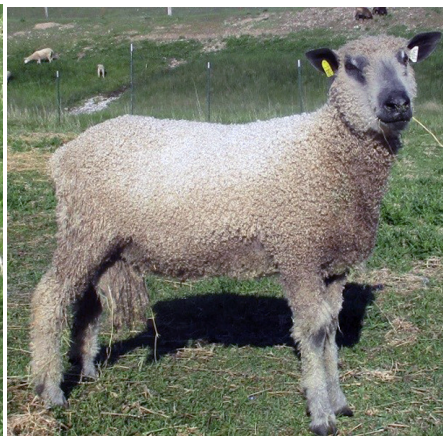
The call info will be emailed to all Active members of the NAWSA.

The Ram Not Chosen by Cory Simpson continued.

The neck should be of medium length, well set on the shoulders. The breed should exhibit straight top line and generally good capacity in the chest.



Legs should be wide and well set, not bow legged, or cow hocked, with enough angle not to be post legged but not so much angle that they'd be sickle hocked either.



Fleece should be of good Wensleydale type, with well-defined, lustrous long locks with uniform

Once I've determined that a ram is of good Wensleydale type, the second question I ask is what do I want to improve between the ewes he'll be put with and the next generation? For example, if the fleece isn't where I want it on the ewes, my main focus will be searching for a ram with a great fleece. If their pigment isn't as dark as I'd like, I'll try to pair them with a ram that has very dark skin, etc. Now with that said, we don't want to select for a single trait either, the ram has to be balanced on the whole or we risk dropping the overall quality to go after a single trait. Good examples are breeds who select for the show ring and neglect fleece growth rate or other production traits. Often they can find themselves trying to import genetics from their breed in other countries to try to get back to what their breed was originally selected for.

Now that the basics are covered let's take a closer look at individual traits. I once read an advertisement for a registered Angus cattle herd. The line that stuck in my mind was: "Large enough to know what we're doing, small enough to still care". When I bought some used UK Wensleydale flock books, I noticed that the flocks that were breeding the most ewes had been highlighted. Livestock breeding is kind of like rolling the dice with each mating.

The Ram Not Chosen by Cory Simpson continued.

The famous line from the song "The Gambler" by Don Schlitz and made famous by Kenny Rogers comes to mind and seems applicable if we apply it to genetic traits:

*"The secret to survivin' Is knowin' what to throw away,
And knowin' what to keep, 'Cause every hand's a winner.
And every hand's a loser You've got to know when
to hold 'em, Know when to fold 'em
Know when to walk away. And know when to run."*

In his book SHEEP SUCCESS <https://www.amazon.com/Sheep-Success-Costwold-Better-Bucks/dp/096651033X> Nathan Griffith talks about the history of longwools appearing as a unique single animal being born in Greece many years ago. A few years later another animal of similar type was born. You'll have to read Nathan's book for more of the history of it and how longwools came to England. But the applicable point to be made is that with each mating the animal passes down only one of the two genes it carries. Outstanding lambs can be born from average parents, but the advantage to high quality purebreds is that with each generation of "rolling the dice", we increase the odds of getting better lambs, replacing the proverbial low numbers/poor genetic traits with more chances of getting and combining the traits we want. (If you think like you have two dice and you want to get the number 12 on each roll, in essence as breeders we're selecting to replace the low numbers with high numbers/positive traits on each location to improve the breed and reduce the number of lambs that aren't good enough to keep for

breeding).

This brings me to the point of why numbers matter. I'll use selecting for color patterns as an example. Let's say you have two white sheep that both carry the colored gene. Statistically one in four lambs would have two white genes, two out of the four would carry a colored gene and not express it, and one out of the four would be colored and not carry a white gene. As such, the more quality sheep being bred the more chances of combining the various traits we're looking for while removing undesirable traits from the breed as we keep the best and cull the rest. Which brings to mind the line from the gambler again: "Every hand's a winner and every hand's a loser".

Over time our flocks become what we make of them depending on what we select for. In any registered flock or upgrading program it becomes tempting to select for paper, i.e. percent of Wensleydale or diversity of bloodlines. And while both matter in the right context, neither one builds a quality flock on its own. Depending on which genes get passed down, the best lamb may be a lower percentage one with common ancestors or a high percentage one with lots of outcrosses. The value in calculating percentage comes in estimating the amount of desirable Wensleydale genes in the lambs, but with each generation some lambs will carry more of the foundation stock genetics and others more of the Wensleydale genetics so it becomes essential to select for phenotype keeping in mind the traits of the parents and how their lambs have looked in the past.

Observations to consider

I think the most important part in livestock selection is observing the animal, not just when it's born or bought, but every day over the years. Fleece growth patterns seem to change as the animal gets older. I've seen some where the fleece can be amazingly curly when the wool is short, but then tends to lose lock structure when the fleece gets longer, only to look nice again a few months after shearing. Others maintain uniformity along the staple length for the whole season. That's why in the breed standard, the diagram shows that the purl should be uniform from base to tip.

<http://nebula.wsimg.com/9a8501167edc97e842e4944280319174?AccessKeyId=F6132292D360B2F00367&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>

But we see the same type of change in observed type in other traits too. Ear pigment comes to mind with how some Wensleydale lambs can be born with light ears that then change to dark, both with age and sunlight exposure. If we want to make progress we need to focus on selecting rams that have solid black ears at birth. Another interesting trait tends to be kemp or hair, and while we really don't see it in Wensleydales it does still deserve mention because of Wensleydales' purpose as

a crossing sire. I've often seen fine or medium wool breed lambs that are born with kempy fleeces or hair on the belly which is not as noticeable on the adults. It's probably still there and might show up in the finished yarn which is why the belly and top knot is often removed when shearing those breeds. But it's one of those traits that is hard for shepherds to fully appreciate without thinking about it on the young lambs.

While on the topic of fleece traits, one thing I have noticed in Wensleydales is what seem to be minor guard hairs. This is not evidenced to the extent it is in other breeds. But if you look closely (i.e. putting a few locks on top of the palm of your hand) a few months after shearing you may notice that some Wensleydales have even ends on the locks, while others have a few longer fibers that seem to stick out past the end of the curl, usually by about ¼ to ½ inch. It may not matter much, but I plan to send off fleece samples for micron testing to see if the ones with slightly longer fibers show up as some fibers being coarser on the spectrogram. It can be a hard trait to observe/select for; especially as the fleece gets longer, but I think with careful observation it's another area where we can make improvements over time.

INTERESTING BREED STASTICS:

121 records found matching Date of Birth "2014"
136 records found matching Date of Birth "2015"
154 records found matching Date of Birth "2016"
165 records found matching Date of Birth "2017"
150 records found matching Date of Birth "2018"

Total active animals 480 as defined by any activity in the last 24 months i.e. born, transferred, or listed as the sire or dam

Rams = 132 Ewes = 348

The year 2018 had 41 membership renewals & 10 new members

The Ram Not Chosen by Cory Simpson continued.

There has been discussion in various groups about handle, crimp, drape and curvature of the fibers. It used to be that a small crimp was always associated with a low micron count, but they have been shown to be two separate characteristics. I have read where people speculate that the curl lessens the soft handle or drape, but I have enough sheep of various breeds to know this is not the case. For example the Tog on a Lincoln Icelandic cross might have a lot of drape but a rough handle. When you look at a longwools' back the wool tends to either part with what I often hear referred to as "drape" showing the sheep's skin or it tends to have enough 3D structure curl/curvature of the fibers that the wool stands up and covers the skin for a half inch or more before it falls over the sides in long locks. Rather it seems that the handle has more to do with the shape of the scales on the fibers. Recently I've noticed my main herd ram's fleece stays much cleaner than others in the flock. At this point I don't know if it has something to do with the scales on the fibers or be something else, but it seems like something worthy of study and observation.

Another thing I'm noticing on fleece traits is fiber transparency, as compared to the fibers being translucent. When you get animals on one extreme or the other side by side it becomes more apparent. With today's technology in genetic testing

we're seeing where the genes for certain traits can be identified. In cattle, people now use genetic tests to estimate traits like weaning weight, tenderness, rib eye size etc. It can be a valuable tool and I think Neogen's custom panel and arrays may hold a lot of potential for the breed. <https://genomics.neogen.com/en/sheep-and-goat>. The thing to keep in mind with genetic testing for traits is that they tend to be as accurate as evaluating 10 to 36 of the sires' offspring, depending on which trait you evaluate. <http://www.angus.org/AGI/GenomicEnhancedEPDs.pdf>

It can be a good tool to use, but in the end, livestock selection will always be an art form where we have to observe not only the different traits that the genes code for, but also the interactions they have with each other. And that is something complex enough that I don't think it can ever be fully understood or predicted. This is perhaps the biggest value in an out-cross is that it introduces new genes that could result in untested combinations or effects on current genes producing traits better than any we've seen before. Genetic diversity matters because it is the resource we use for constant improvement while keeping the breed pure and true to type. Well that's about it for now. I hope this has "been an ace that you can keep". Here's hoping for a mild winter and amazing new lambs.

From the Editor: I pressed Cory hard for this article on breeding, and I was not disappointed in the result. I have elected to put the full article in this edition so as to keep the content together. As a new breeder, I am seeking to make this newsletter friendly to those who choose to invest in the Wensleydale breed. I am hoping to make this venue a means of validating your years of investment as well as thought-provoking enough to encourage all of us to continue to strive for excellence. **Please consider making a contribution to future editions!!**

Mary J. McKennan

Attention Breeders:

- 1) **You get a discount for registering animals before 9 months of age, and no animals can be registered after they reach 24 months.**
- 2) **REMINDER:** Be sure to read the bylaws and the breed up guidelines.

Semen used for AI must meet NAWSA standards to ensure the outcome can be registered. If you have questions, ask before you proceed!!

American Consortium for Small Ruminant Parasite Control is a great and reliable source for breeders: Visit their website for more info. <https://www.wormx.info>

BioWorma is now available at Premier1.

Barbervax is a vaccine for sustainable control of Barbers Pole worm. Available in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, the US and Canadian sheep industries are working together to get it approved for use in US and Canada.

<https://www.wormx.info/single-post/2019/08/20/A-Vaccine-for-Barber-Pole-Worm>



**Wensleydale & Teeswater
Luster Longwool Sheep**

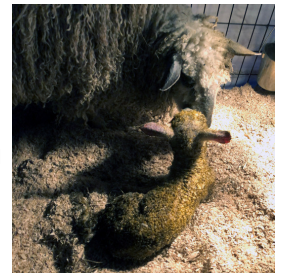
extraordinary fleeces
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Rachel, the imaginary friend from my childhood

I am a person who learns by doing.... So when Rachel presented herself and her mom refused to feed her, I had to learn a lot fast. This was my first experience with lambing. Fortunately, I had acquired a recommended book. "Managing Your Ewe." I supplemented her with a bottle for 5 days, but it became clear very quickly that I had to intervene. The book said that she had 0% chance of survival without mom's colostrum... I ordered a product to address that and read that alternative ways to address this were to vaccinate her as the book recommended... C&D toxoid and antitoxin were administered as directed, and the pneumonia intervention was also given. Every time she got the pneumonia vaccine, she got pneumonia. Antibiotics addressed that. She loved her bottle, and I loved the time I spent giving it to her. She spent the first few months of her life in the house and gradually became stronger as we faced each new challenge together. Being raised in a puppy pen with the dogs all around had advantages. She loves the dogs. She has grown to be a gorgeous young ewe who races to meet me when I come out to feed the sheep. I wouldn't change a thing.



Mary J. McKennan, Brambling Rose Ranch



Shepherds Lane photo



Teeswater

Rare Breeds provide a palette for creativity



Wensleydale

Registered Purebred American

Wensleydale & Teeswater Sheep

Years of selective breeding with excellent bloodlines have produced high percentage animals with outstanding dual-purpose qualities

Improve your FLOCK • Improve your FIBER

with registered stock



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