



Newsletter Winter 2020

Edition

From the President..... Greetings fellow Wensleydale breeders.

2020 looks to be an active year for the Association. I once heard that "when you talk you're repeating what you already know, but when you listen you may learn something new". I am thankful for all the different perspectives we have in the association. We truly have a wealth of knowledge and experiences among our members and the more that everyone gets involved the more we all benefit from each other's perspectives. We have a number of exciting projects planned for 2020 and we can't do it without you!

We're hoping to offer a mug and calendar for sale to help promote the breed and we'd like to invite everyone to submit pictures of registered Wensleydales for consideration. See the details below. This can be a great opportunity to showcase your beautiful sheep to other breeders and the public at large while building interest in the breed as a whole.

We'd also like to ask for your input on where you'd like to see the association advertise. Some suggestions that have been floated include PLY Magazine, Spinoff, Countryside Magazine (formerly SHEEP magazine), Another idea that has been floated is starting a yearly sire directory. Details on the right.

Looking forward to hearing your thoughts,
Cory Simpson

Yearly Sire Directory Project

- 1) featuring photos of ram and sired lambs annually with 5-generation pedigree
- 2) Page size 8.5 by 5.5
- 3) Showcase your flock, offer semen or stock for sale.
- 4) Full contact information on each ram.

Wensleydale Calendar & Mug Promotion Projects

Please submit pictures of NAWSA registered Wensleydales for consideration. Submissions must be received by **April 1, 2020**. E-mail your pictures to mailto:

Board@wensleydalesheep.org;

Photos should be jpeg format 1600x1200 pixels or greater in size.

- 1) Credit will be given to the breeder for each photo used.
- 2) Include a written statement of permission and release for the clubs use. The photos become the property of NAWSA for use in promotional efforts.

[Deadline for participation is April 1, 2020.](#)

Hello, North American Wensleydale Association

From Jayne Dryden Home Farm Wensleydales, the Cotswolds, UK.

What's on your needles is a common question we ask our fellow knitters but a different question might be how did that ball of wool get on your needles??

I am Jayne Dryden, my passion is Home Farm Wensleydales and I wanted to share with you the incredible journey of a ball of my Wensleydale wool and the process to get it on your needles.

I guess a good place to start with is our breeding program where we carefully select and match our rams with our ewes to produce strong sheep with great conformation and a lustrous Wensleydale fleece.



We keep detailed records on every single one of our 500 sheep at Home Farm, their weight and health and we match this with the laboratory testing that we take from many of the fleeces and strive every year to produce a better fleece from a stronger sheep. That's the theory but often mother nature has other ideas – ie the weather!

So, back to lambing time. I think it's incredibly important to ensure the pregnant ewe has adequate nutrition in her diet because the wool follicles first appear in the foetus at around 60 days after conception, that is about 90 days before the birth of the lamb.

By the time the lamb is born the primary follicles are fully developed. However, the finest fibres in an adult sheep are produced from the secondary follicles which start to develop during the last third of gestation.

By the time a well-fed lamb is 6 to 8 weeks old around 80% of its final number of follicles will be producing fibres. This illustrates the need for good nutrition for the ewe during pregnancy and the quality of milk for the new born lamb.



My ewes and lambs are turned out as soon as possible onto our ancient ridge and furrow pasture into clean paddocks. This type of land gives the sheep a dry place to graze and rest and limits the dirt that gets into their fleece.

We shear most of our sheep at the end of May but we decide at the end of the summer if we want to shear any lambs in August.

Our shearer is a specialist from Wales who treats the sheep with the care and respect necessary for an animal of this size.

Lambs locks are very popular but it always depends on the lamb as to whether or not it is ready for shearing.

At shearing I am looking for a heavy lustrous fleece – full of lanolin and as clean as possible. We never wash our fleece while it is still on the sheep.

Jayne Dryden continued.

The quality of the washing after shearing is substantially better if the sheep as not been previous washed.

The spin quality and count is tested annually after shearing. This can be spot checked or collectively tested after washing and combing.

After skirting I check the soundness of each fleece. I'm looking for wool breaks but given the priority I place on nutrition and welfare I do not expect any.

A white lustrous yarn is the object (unless we are talking black or grey wensleydales) - because the whiter the wool means it can be dyed into delicate shades. We never pack any belly wool or urine stained wool in our clip.

I'm also checking the skirted fleece for length – and I'm looking for a consistent length across the fleece as this gives consistency in the combing and spinning process.

In the UK there are several options to have the clip commercially washed, combed and spun. I choose to send my wool to Yorkshire for commercial washing and combing and then spinning.



Wensleydale sheep produce an incredible fibre. The lustre carries through from the fleece to the finished wool. The fibre is strong yet comfortable to wear – you can always expect a garment to hold its shape and drape. This fibre dyes better than any other fibre I have worked with.

A very popular fibre with spinners for both traditional spinning from combed top to the more challenging lock and tail spinning.



No doubt about it, the Wensleydale is a challenging sheep to keep – there is a reason why they are rare! But you are very much rewarded with the most beautiful lustrous fibre from sheep with real character and attitude.



"NAWSA Online (https://www.glmregistry.com/nawsa/online/html/nawsa_login.html) is where members can renew their NAWSA membership, register animals, transfer ownership etc. In addition, it is an excellent source of information on Wensleydale sheep across the country. If you click on the heading "Tools" you will see the following options:

There is much to explore! A couple of pointers:

1. *Member ID* is listed on the breeder list on the NAWSA website.
2. To see a list of your registered animals, select '*My Animal Listing*' and if you leave the default search parameters as they are, you will get a full listing. If you want to narrow this down, you can do this by entering birth date, sex, status etc.
3. "*Maintain animal status*" – this allows you to update the status of your animals so that you can differentiate between active (breeding animals in your flock) vs inactive animals.
4. If you want to search for a particular animal, you need to know something about it to track it down, but it can be quite general to start. If you know dam/sire/breeder/current owner ID#, birth date, then you can enter these. Alternatively you can enter "2019" and select date of birth, you will generate a list of all registered animals born in 2019. If you are looking for a particular UK ram background, you can input "UK" and select "sire" to generate a list of UK progeny.

NAWSA Breed Statistics

165 records found matching Date of Birth "2017"
160 records found matching Date of Birth "2018"
169 records found matching Date of Birth "2019"

Karen Stern, NAWSA Director

Growing Wensleydales in the US

I saw my first Wensleydale sheep (courtesy of Virginia Scholomiti of Yellow Farm) at Rhinebeck Sheep & Wool festival in 2008. I loved the majestic appearance and when I touched the cool, silky, purlled wool – I was hooked. I wanted to produce this beautiful wool but, over the years, have learned that there are many factors that influence the quality of a fleece and many possible strategies to overcome these challenges.



Wensleydales were developed in the UK with the arrival of the ram “BlueCap” in a specific location and with specific breeding goals (chiefly to be used as a sire on hill flocks to improve fleece quality). The US is 40X the size of the UK, and in spite of the diverse climate and geography, Wensleydale breeders are found throughout the US. Where the climate in the US differs significantly from that in the UK (pretty much everywhere but parts of the northwest!), breeders have had to develop strategies to help Wensleydales flourish and grow beautiful fleece.

What defines a good Wensleydale fleece? I think it is one with good breed character (color, luster, purl, etc.), and is strong and clean. When we label fleeces as Wensleydale, we need to be sure that they actually look and feel like Wensleydale. Given the upgrading program, there has been significant input from other longwool breeds and the character of those breeds can appear even in higher percentage animals, unless we select against them. Strong fibers are harvested from healthy sheep, shorn at time when the effects of stressors (i.e. gestation/lactation) can be minimized. For those growing longer fleeces, we have to watch for coting/felting and damage to the fiber that results in weakness. Clean is relative (!!) but our husbandry greatly impacts cleanliness during the growth of the animal/fleece (i.e. minimizing contamination with vegetable matter like hay and straw), also at shearing (second cuts etc.). The specifics of how we keep our animals (year round grazing or confined to a dry paddock or fed hay etc.) will determine how easy or difficult it will be to grow clean fleece. While not all fleece makes the grade as premium hand spinning/handcrafting fiber, it is nonetheless valuable when processed into other forms including mill spun yarn, roving etc.

Growing beautiful Wensleydale sheep and their fleece is an interplay between climate and sheep husbandry, together with the inherent character of the breed. My suggestion to new breeders is to learn about how other breeders in their part of the country raise their sheep. And consider what kind of farm/infrastructure you have, the size of your intended flock, how intensive your management strategy is, etc. And if this was not interesting enough, add in the variation introduced by weather and genetics! Wensleydales are a fascinating breed of sheep that I truly enjoy raising. I look forward to seeing the breed grow in the US!

Karen Stern, Windsong Farm

From the Editor... The participation in this issue is inspiring. Please consider how you can contribute... Articles with photos, stories about your flock. All make good reading to those vested in Wensleydales. Mary J. McKennan

Wool Knowledge is Power - Your Wool as Yarn

By Virginia Scholomiti



Let's get down to the nuts and bolts of understanding where and how your fleece may fit into a hand spinner's palette. This is just one of the uses for wool but a good one to start with. Before you can think of assessing the fiber your

flock produces to figure out how best to market it to spinners, you need at least a nodding acquaintance with some of the terms and technicalities of what spinning is all about.

Your customers will undoubtedly ask questions about your product, and this demands at least some knowledge on your part.



Don't worry, you do not have to find a lot of time in your already full day to take up carding and combing or spend your hard-earned cash to purchase a spinning wheel. You don't have to knit or crochet or felt, but you do need to understand what you are talking about when it comes to your own fiber and its potential. You will be looking to build a customer base, folks that will return to you in the future, and recommend you to their friends as a (trusted?) good source. You will be the expert in the fiber you have and should be ready to answer some questions from potential buyers.

Educate yourself to evolve as a fiber supplier. This way you can accurately answer questions about the specific fiber your flock is producing. You will also gain the opportunity to understand how to improve your flock by breeding for the characteristics needed for a premium return. You can also consider enlisting a family member or friend who already has an attraction to fiber. They actually get excited about wanting to pursue this for you.

You also may find a local fiber lover or spinner that might agree to meet with you and discuss your fiber. They might even hand process some of it and spin it for you or spin it raw. Check your area for a local spinning guild, they can be a great resource. Their feedback may serve to help you identify what attributes your fiber may have for the fiber community. You might convince a spinner to spin up some samples for you to use in representing your fleeces for market. One note of caution here, if you use the skills and impressions of one spinner, they may come with their own preconceptions on what fiber they like to work with which could bias their impression of your fiber, and their skill level may or may not produce the best type of spin for your particular fiber. The internet can also be a great resource if you know what to search for and can trust the opinions of the sites you visit. Like everything else on a farm, you really are best having some knowledge about this yourself.

NAWSA

Volunteer Opportunities

- 1) Update membership packets and brochures.
- 2) If you have a talent or skill you would like to invest, contact the board.

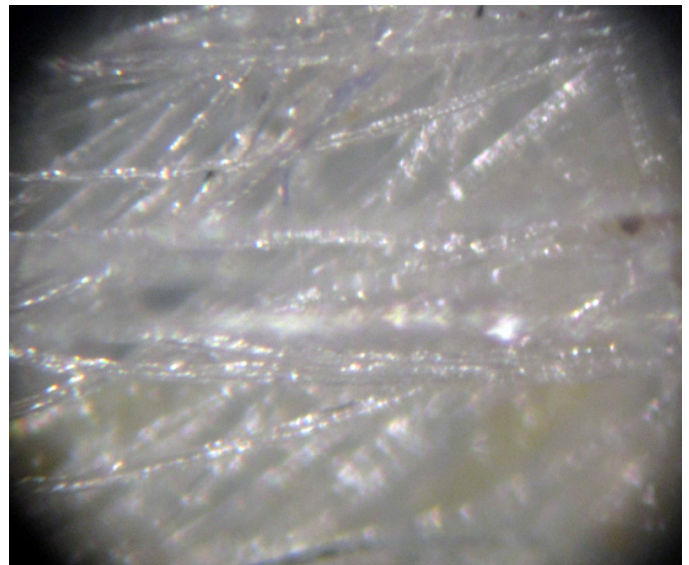
nawsaboard@gmail.com

The Tide has Turned

By Cory Simpson

Is Rearden Metal good or not? The line from Atlas shrugged swirled through my mind as I picked myself up after slipping on the ice. When we start raising livestock we often have the same relative ignorance as the general public as to what makes something good. A prime example of this was when we were hauling a bred cow back from Oregon who had been AI'd to the Angus Bull Double vision. When we stopped at a hotel for the night we asked to get water for the animals and of course everyone was curious so when I said that she was half parthenaise (a low fat/lean meat breed) bred to an Angus bull, someone made the comment, isn't Angus the best there is? It's an interesting question as Angus tends to have the same mainstream name recognition as merino with little actual understanding of what makes something good. Lean meat has been advocated for years, even Wensleydales in their early days were praised for their massive amounts of lean meat, and in sheep, lean meat tends to be favored as long as it has 2 to 4% fat. Looking at a meat case most people would probably pick out the steak with the least internal fat/marbling, yet that is the very thing that Angus breeders select for because it is something that makes the steak juicy/adds flavor. Now how does this relate to wool? What makes wool good? If you ask the general public they'd probably say things like being soft, strong and warm. But as with meat there are a lot of different characteristics that makes wool desirable. Some of which the general public doesn't even think about because they've never seen them before i.e. luster etc. other traits like being soft or strong are just generally not understood well by the average consumer. "Wool fibers can bend over 20,000 times before they break, whereas cotton can bend only 3,000 times" <https://news.orvis.com/products-we-love/wool-vs-cotton-when-and-where> Now Wensleydale has an advantage over other wools because it is a thicker/stronger fiber with better length. What about softness? For years and years industry groups and government agencies have drilled in the idea that the finer the wool the better. Yet fine doesn't necessarily mean soft. Prime examples of this can be found with both Suffolks or Hamps and Rambouillet or other merino strains having fleeces in the 25 micron range yet feeling vastly different from each other. This is where "handle" comes into consideration. The first time I heard handle mentioned was at the National Lincoln show and sale in 2004 when the judge commented on it. I asked breeders what it meant and most really didn't know. But in essence it seems to be how smooth the fiber feels effected by the number or shape of the microscopic scales on the fiber. Don't get me wrong, micron size does effect the finished product, but it is only one of

several factors. The main thing that makes finer wool softer is that the smaller the cut end of the fiber, the less noticeable it is when it comes in contact with sensitive skin. Now on coarser wools the yarn is often spun larger and looser so that more of the smooth length of the fiber comes in contact with the skin rather than the end of the fiber which ideally is tucked more into the center of the yarn. I feel that to truly maximize the potential Wensleydales have to offer, we should try to select for fleeces that are in that 25 to 30 micron size. Coarse enough that the wool has the strength/durability, breathability (fine wool always feels claustrophobic to me, especially on socks) and amazing luster (Wensleydale wool under the microscope)



yet fine enough that is enjoyable for most clothing applications. (i.e. fibers over 30 microns decrease Comfort Factor.) Historically this is supported in the preface of the very first Wensleydale flock book written in 1890 (page 17) when it mentions that "Anything approaching the coarseness of fleece of the Lincoln was strongly objected to" I was looking at the weekly market report for wools and noticed that commercially in the US the highest prices were for wools in the 21 to 23 micron range. Finer than that and the price dropped and coarser then that and the price dropped. I asked why that was on a sheep producers group and got the following in reply "Better fit for our textile machinery. Much less fussy. Doesn't break or pill as much. More versatile. Higher demand. . .

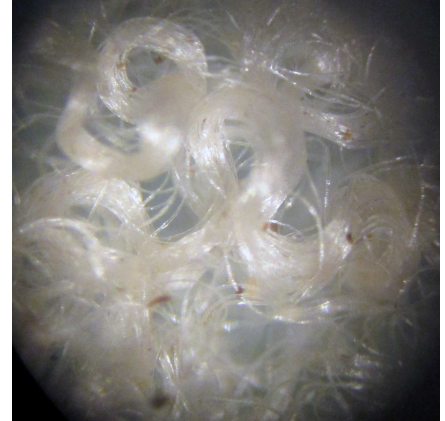
" Basically I think we see a goldilocks zone for micron size (i.e. under 30 but above 21) with amazing potential for Wensleydale wool in everyday uses. For example, the average person in Montana buys \$2550 of clothing each year. This would make my little

The Tide has Turned continued

By Cory Simpson

home county in the middle of nowhere a potential market of over 28 million a year. A lot of which is imported synthetic fibers or gmo cotton. How much of that could be wool? I think we're seeing where the tide has turned and consumers are starting to care more about the quality of the items they buy. If we can show them that it's not just a better item because it's all natural with beautiful luster but also that it's more durable than other materials (i.e. cheaper cost per days worn) without the toxic chemicals used in it's production I think it makes a strong selling point to really expand and improve the breed. Especially if we can understand what makes the wool good and select our flocks in the right direction. Which brings me to my final point on

fleece characteristics. When we hauled the Targhee type wool down to center of the nations this Spring the guy commented that you'll often see Suffolk wool blended in socks because it gives them more of a cushion. I know there has been debate over the years about things like crimp or curl being linked to fiber size/micron. But more and more they are being recognized as separate traits. I have 3 fine wool sheep in my flock which I estimate to all be about the same micron size yet that demonstrate that crimp and curl are independent characteristics. Below from left to right are pictures of fine wool that is straight, crimped and curly/bouncy under the microscope at 30 times magnification.



And while Wensleydale is harder to see the difference in under the microscope, it's easier to see with the naked eye as we select for the type of locks we want. i.e. curly vs more straight.

Volume 3 of the Wensleydale flock book. Seems as true today as it was 127 years ago. " if breeders will only persevere in the judicious mating and careful registration of their flocks, they will, when the tide turns, reap their reward, and prove the soundness of their policy in comparison with that of those who carry on breeding in comparative ignorance of the origin of the material with which they are working. "

I think the tide has turned with consumers perhaps now more than ever looking for healthy natural alternatives. There are lots of great mills all around the country where shepherds can have their wool spun or even knitted into finished products. <https://localfiber.org/events/creating-value-added-products-from-your-fiber/> Let's seize the opportunity and see how much Wensleydale wool people can use in their everyday lives.



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“The Way Back” Bred and Owned by Cory Simpson



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