

What's so great about Hair sheep?

Originally, all sheep were hair sheep. Today, hair sheep include sheep with virtually no woolly fibers, sheep that shed their fleeces (mixture of hair and wool) naturally, and sheep whose fleeces contain too much hair to be suitable for the commercial wool markets. There is diversity within the breeds, but one thing's for certain, hair sheep are growing in popularity and the reasons are many.



No shearing

It may not be pretty, but hair sheep naturally shed their coats. There is no need for shearing or crutching. Unless you grow fine wool or niche market your wool, there's really no money in wool, and shearers are getting scarcer. Shearing is a welfare concern.



No docking

You don't need to dock the tails of hair sheep lambs. Because many are destined for non-traditional markets, they are often not castrated either. Docking and castrating are welfare concerns.

Reproductive efficiency

Hair sheep excel in reproductive traits: early puberty, good mothering and milking, prolificacy, and out-of-season breeding. 200% lamb crops are the norm.



Crossing 'em

It's not uncommon to cross hair sheep with wool breeds to make composite females and crossbred market lambs. Fleeces from hair x wool crosses should be discarded.

Market share

Hair sheep are well-suited to the ethnic and other non-traditional markets. In 2018, more than 90% of the lambs sold in San Angelo (TX) were hair sheep. Approximately 50% of the lambs sold in New Holland (PA) are hair sheep. Some markets favor "unblemished" hair sheep lambs. In terms of purebred registrations and transfers, the two most popular US breeds are hair sheep: Katahdin and Dorper.



Parasite resistance

Though it varies by breed, hair sheep are more resistant to worm parasites. The St. Croix is the most resistant breed in the US. It is possible to select Katahdin rams with EBVs for fecal egg count (parasite resistance).



Made for grass

While adaptable to different production systems, their size and fitness, make hair sheep well-suited to pasture-based production. Their easy-care nature makes them a good choice for solar grazing and other targeted grazing. Hair sheep are also popular for training herding dogs.