

Prolific breeds

Prolificacy refers to the number of lambs produced per lambing (or litter size). It is the primary driver of profitability. Most sheep have 1 or 2 lambs, while some breeds average over 2 lambs and some frequently give birth to 3 or more lambs.



Two of the most prolific sheep breeds are **Romanov** and **Finnsheep** (Finnish Landrace). Both are Northern European short-tailed breeds. It is not unusual for them to give birth to more than 3 lambs at a time. They are often used in crossbreeding programs to increase lambing percentage in commercial flocks.



Hair sheep (of Caribbean origin) are known for their prolificacy. Prolific breeds include St. Croix, Barbados Blackbelly, and Katahdin.



The **East Friesian** is a high-producing dairy sheep known for its prolificacy, 2.2 to 2.5 lambs per (mature) ewe lambing.



The **Rideau Arcott**, developed in Canada, averages 2.5 lambs per ewe lambing. The breed is a composite with 40 percent Finn blood.



The **Polypay** is a dual-purpose composite breed developed in the US. It is 25 percent Finn. Mature ewes average 2.4 lambs.



The ◀ **Booroola** is a strain of Merino with high prolificacy. Unlike most breeds, the Booroola was identified to have a single gene (FecB) which increases ovulation rates. The high fecundity gene can be introduced into other breeds via crossbreeding. A similar gene (Thoka) has been identified in **Icelandic** ▶ sheep.

