

US Hair Sheep Breeds

There is considerable diversity among US hair (or shedding) sheep breeds. Katahdin and Dorper are composite breeds, mixes of hair and wool sheep. They are the most popular. Landrace breeds which originated in the Caribbean (from African hair sheep) include the Barbados Blackbelly and St. Croix. Newer breeds (also composites) include the Royal White®, St. Augustine, “American” Australian White, and Easycare (USMARC Composite IV). There are also “trophy” breeds of hair sheep, raised predominantly for their colorful markings and distinct horns.

The Katahdin is probably the **best “all-around”** hair sheep breed in terms of reproduction, growth, carcass, and fitness. It is a composite American breed developed from African hair sheep (St. Croix) and British meat-type



wool sheep, notably the Suffolk. The Katahdin is the most popular hair breed in the US. In terms of registrations and transfers, it is also the most popular breed of sheep in the US. Katahdins are often the breed of choice for solar grazing.



The Barbados Blackbelly originated on the island of Barbados. The US breed association recognizes both Barbados (polled) and American Blackbelly (horned) sheep. The American variety is the result of crossing the Barbados Blackbelly with other US breeds. The American Blackbelly is more numerous than its Caribbean cousin. Many of the “trophy” hair sheep breeds are derived from the Blackbelly.

The St. Croix is native to the US Virgin Islands. It has the distinction of being the **most parasite-resistant** breed of sheep in the US. It has been crossed with other breeds to create several other hair breeds, notably the Katahdin, but also, the Royal White® and St. Augustine.



The Dorper is a South African breed that was first imported into the US in the early 1990’s. It is the **fastest growing heaviest muscled** hair breed in the US. It is best suited to hot, dry climates. The Dorper has also been used to create new breeds (e.g., Australian White, Royal White®, and St. Augustine).

Twenty-seven percent of the sheep in the US are now hair or hair x wool crosses.