Resistant Breeds

US sheep breeds with documented resistance to gastrointestinal parasites

No breed of sheep is completely immune to gastrointestinal parasites (worms); however, some breeds are naturally more resistant than others. In general, hair sheep tend to be more resistant than wool sheep. There are also, some wooled breeds with documented resistance to worms.

St. Croix

The St. Croix is the most parasite resistant sheep breed in the US. It is a landrace hair sheep native to the US Virgin Islands. It crosses well and has been used to create several other breeds including the Katahdin.

Barbados Blackbelly

The Barbados Blackbelly is another landrace hair sheep with parasite resistance. The breed is native to the Caribbean Island of Barbados. The American Blackbelly would be expected to have some resistance, but probably not as much as the original breed, due to the introduction of more susceptible breeds.

Katahdin

The Katahdin is a composite hair (or shedding) breed derived from crosses with Caribbean hair and British wool breeds. Its parasite resistance is usually intermediate between landrace hair sheep and conventional wool sheep.

Gulf Coast Native & Florida Cracker

Breeds native to the southeastern US have long been documented to have some resistance to internal parasites. These breeds evolved via natural selection in humid, worm-rich environments. They are medium wooled with variable genetic composition.

Texel

Among terminal sire breeds, the Texel has demonstrated some resistance to internal parasites. However, its mechanism of resistance differs from the more resistant St. Croix. While the St. Croix prevents adult worms from getting established, the Texel seems to reduce their egg laying ability, thus, lowering fecal egg counts

Parasite resistance is when an animal limits parasitic infection by preventing parasites from establishing or growing. Resistance is assessed with fecal egg counts (worm eggs per gram of feces). Parasite resilience is when an animal tolerates a parasite load and is still able to stay healthy and produce. Resilience is assessed by clinical parameters such as FAMACHA© score, body condition score, and average daily gain. Resistance and resilience are separate but correlated traits. However, the correlation is not always high. More genetic progress will be made if animals with low fecal egg counts can be identified and favored in selection and breeding decisions.

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