

# 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 woolled 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 resistance, but probably not as much as the

Caribbean breed, due to the introduction of susceptible breeds.

## ▼ Katahdin

The Katahdin is a composite breed derived from crosses with hair and wool breeds. Its parasite resistance is considered intermediate between landrace hair sheep and conventional wool sheep.

## Gulf Coast Native ▼ and Florida Cracker

Breeds native to the southeastern US have long been documented to have resistance to internal parasites. These breeds evolved under natural selection in worm-rich environments. They are woolled with variable genetic composition.



## ▼ Texel ▼

Among terminal sire breeds, the Texel is more resistant than the Suffolk. However, their mechanism of resistance is different from the 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 measured by fecal egg counts (worm eggs per gram of feces). In contrast, parasite resilience is when an animal tolerates a parasite load and is still able to stay healthy and produce. Resilience is assessed by clinical signs such as FAMACHA© score and average daily gain. Resistance and resilience are usually correlated, but the correlation is not always high. Selection emphasis should be on resistance (fecal egg counts).

