

“World’s Cutest Sheep” Make U.S. Debut

Promoted as the cutest sheep in the world, a small group of Valais Blacknose sheep are now at home in Oregon. Joy and Martin Dally imported semen from select flocks and are leading a breed-up program to establish the breed in the U.S. The horned breed has long, coarse wool and black nose, eyes, ears and leggings.

“People think they are ornamental, but they are large, and they have a lot of hybrid vigor,” says Martin. “Bred with Teeswater ewes, the lambs have a stupendous growth rate.”

For centuries the breed, raised for both meat and wool, was found only in one region of Switzerland. In recent years it has spread to other countries in Europe and to Great Britain.

Initially the Dallys tried using Scottish Blackface ewes as a foundation breed for the breed-up program. They hope to breed successive generations back to Valais Blacknose rams. By the fifth generation the lambs will be 97 percent pure. The problem is getting the right characteristics to breed true. The Scottish Blackface had a similar coloring, but the Dallys like results with Gotland and Teeswater ewes better.

“I saw a Gotland in Sweden that had been crossed with Valais and the F1, F2 and F3 generations looked wonderful,” says Joy.

“The Teeswater wool is superior, and both crosses have the facial and leg patterning of the Valais. We have 7 to 8-in. wool on the F1s.”

The Dallys have established the North American Valais Blacknose Sheep Association. They are working with other breeders around the country to establish breeding flocks and build interest in the breed.

Rams can reach 32-in. heights, while ewes run 28 to 30 in. Weights can vary for rams from 176 to 276 lbs., while ewes range from 154 to 190 lbs.

While they are big, they are also very docile and friendly, almost too much so, suggests Martin. “Our sheep dogs don’t like them because they won’t move,” he says. “They are always in your face.”

This fall Gotland, Teeswater and Scottish Blackface ewes carrying 50 percent Blacknose lambs will be available. Prices ranging from \$1,750 to \$2,500 will depend on the number of lambs (twin or single) and the breed of the ewe. Semen is \$500 per straw.

“We are only offering 50 percent (F1) rams at this time and they are running between \$1,500 to \$2,500,” says Martin. “We are also offering wethers for \$500.”

The Dallys suggest novice sheep breeders enamored with the looks of the Valais breed



Joy and Martin Dally are leading a breed-up program to establish the Valais breed in the U.S. The cute sheep previously were available only in Europe.

start with a wether. Getting involved in a breed-up program is not for those without sheep breeding knowledge, advises Martin.

Joy adds that when selling breeding stock from any of their breeds (Gotland, Teeswater, Wensleydale and now Valais) they match the animal to the buyer.

“We want the right sheep for the right people, their acres, their expertise and their

location,” she says. “We want them to be successful.”

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Martin and Joy Dally, 34503 Meridian Rd., Lebanon, Ore. 97355 (ph 541 258-2692 or 707 696-8472; www.facebook.com/pages/Shepherds-Lane-in-Oregon/1509721439239363).



Karen Nichols and husband Shawn Fisher operate a small on-farm business raising more than 300 chickens, geese and ducks and more than 200 rabbits.

Handful Of Rabbits, Poultry Grow Into Small On-Farm Business

Three years ago Karen Nichols started with 7 rabbits and a small incubator to hatch chicks. Now, with the help of her husband, Shawn Fisher, she raises more than 300 chickens, geese and ducks and hatches eggs from two GQF incubators that hold 400 eggs each. Nichols also runs a rabbitry with more than 200 rabbits.

Nichols grew up in the Southwest, and her family raised rabbits and chickens. That experience and the couple’s desire to grow their own food in retirement led them to raise animals. When Lebanon, Mo., neighbors and friends started asking to buy animals, the hobby became a small business, S&K Poultry & Rabbitry.

“My husband was born and raised here, and we have lots of friends who want to be self-sufficient,” Nichols says.

As the number of animals grew, so did the feed bill, which includes a 27 percent protein mix for poultry feed.

“They eat a lot. Chickens don’t pay for themselves until we hatch eggs,” Nichols notes.

Barns and outbuildings house their rainbow of poultry breeds from traditional breeds such as Buff Orpingtons to Tuxedos,

Italians and Texas A&Ms.

Nichols appreciates breeds like Polish and Silky as “eye candy.”

“I can tell if any are missing,” she laughs. “I know my birds.”

She also raises coturnix quail, a domestic breed that doesn’t require a wildlife permit.

Good fencing, a great Pyrenees dog, and a pet horse help keep predators away.

Nichols’ rabbits - Chinchilla, New Zealand, California and Rex breeds - are housed in cages in the garage, and offspring are sold to local pet stores. Word of mouth and Craigslist help market poultry.

“It is quite a bit of work,” says the mother of five and grandmother of 18. “But it’s like a stress release when I watch the animals. They are highly entertaining.”

For people considering doing something similar, she suggests starting small and building up so that the animals make enough money to pay for themselves.

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They Grow Grain, Grind Grain And Market Grain

“Everything I mill, I grow. So if you want to look at trace-ability, I can give you a 5-year history,” says Jeff Hafner about the products grown on the Iowa farm he operates with his father, Earl.

Selling stone-ground flour from organic, non-GMO grains grown on their 2,000-acre farm is just part of the offerings found at Early Morning Harvest, which also produces vegetables, herbs, and free-range chickens, pork, grass-fed beef, and honey.

When it comes to grain, Hafner focuses on quality and marketing. Flour and corn meal are stone-ground, for example, because it runs cooler than other types of milling and preserves the quality of the grain. It also makes more of an artisan product.

“I look at marketing differently,” Hafner says. “You have to think like a company like Gatorade, not like a farmer. Instead of being locked into a price, I sell to the East and West Coasts.”

Grocery stores, bakers and consumers appreciate the focus on quality and value. The cornmeal, for example is very popular because it is more yellow than most because it’s three times higher in carotene, and is higher in Vitamin A and protein.

Using a grindstone requires the miller to be observant and set the stone correctly to get the right grind and efficiency. The mill uses 20-in. stone wheels powered by a 10 hp. motor to grind corn, wheat, buckwheat and rye.

The Hafners’ packaged grains include everything from polenta to grits and flours. Customers can pick up items at the farm or shop through the business’ online store as well as a variety of stores, including Hy-Vee.

It’s all about quality, Hafner says.

“Our highest priority is caring for our land and animals so that the food we grow and offer is fresh and healthy,” he says.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Jeff Hafner, Early Morning Harvest, 2425 Willow



Jeff Hafner and his father sell organic, non-GMO grains grown on their Iowa farm. Packaged grains include everything from polenta to corn grits to whole wheat flour.



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