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POPULAR WITH HOME SPINNERS

Black Sheep Wool Brings Premium Price

Sheep producers used to put one black sheep in the flock for every 100 head so they could easily tell when the entire flock was in.

But nowadays, black sheep are no longer looked at as just a "marker". Natural colored wool has become popular among home spinners and weavers, and producers can even register their animals with a breed association.

Elaine Vogt, and her husband, Bill, raise sheep near Penn Valley, Calif. About one third of their 70 to 100-head flock are colored.

Ewes vary in color from an almost black to a dark brown with blond highlights on the ends. Some of her animals are registered with the Natural Colored Wool Growers Association, a recognized breed association.

The sheep breed doesn't matter in registration. What's important is that the colored animal was sired by two colored parents. "Every breeder seems to prefer his own breed and that's what the organization was founded for," says Vogt.

But having two colored parents doesn't ensure colored offspring. Vogt says she's had white lambs sired by colored parents, but when those lambs are bred as adults, they frequently produce colored lambs.

The Vogts are working to improve wool quality, pounds of wool produced, and conformation as well as breeding for color. They got started with colored wool in response to demand from customers.

Terry Mendenhall, a sheep producer near Loma Rica, Calif., has also been working to perfect a flock of "black" sheep. From a few colored animals she and her husband started with in 1986, they now have 40 to 50 colored sheep, most with a unique cocoa hue. The remainder of their approximately 120-sheep are white.

Mendenhall says she's been able to identify the gene that carries the chocolate color and has followed it through the animals. "The color is a gene recessive to black and to white," says Mendenhall, a registered nurse who also has a two-year degree in animal science.

The animals may carry the cocoa gene but not exhibit it, but when two carrier animals are bred together, chances are good they will produce chocolate offspring.

In 1990, she predicted she would have 16 cocoa lambs and she had 18. In 1991, she figured on 21 cocoa lambs and she had 26.

Mendenhall has been working mostly with Romney, Rambouillet and Romeldale crosses. "We got into Romneys because we have irrigated pasture, and it's really wet in the winter," says Mendenhall. "Romneys do better when it's wet than fine-haired sheep. And my Romney fleeces sell like fire because they are extremely easy to spin."

A reserve champion fleece from one of her cocoa sheep brought \$12.25 a pound at a recent sale in Monterey, Calif.

The development of colored sheep has followed the growth in popularity of home spinning and weaving. But as the spinners became more proficient, they also began demanding a better quality wool and became more discriminating. Vogt sells her fleeces locally and through auctions. While a top quality colored fleece may bring \$3 to \$12 a pound, most go for a lower price. Nevertheless, a colored fleece sold to a spinner will still bring more than white wool sold to commercial buyers, who pay 15 to 20 cents a pound. Colored wool is docked by commercial buyers.

Photo and story reprinted courtesy Ag Alert



Lee built this full-size replica of the first Farmall prototype - the 1922 "Bombshell".

INDIANA TRACTOR COLLECTOR USED A PHOTO AS A BLUEPRINT

He Built A Replica Of The "First" IH Farmall

Tractor collector Harry Lee owns more than 50 unusual antique tractors but there's never any question which one of his collection is the rarest. Two years ago he built a replica of what many say was the first Farmall ever - the 1922 "Bombshell" which was originally built by engineer Bert Benjamin as a prototype.

Benjamin's machine represented a turning point in the development of row crop tractors because at the time IH was trying to arrive at a basic tractor design. It already had a motorized cultivator on the market and was experimenting with a reversible tractor that could handle a variety of field tasks. When Benjamin put together his tractor, other engineers recognized the versatility and easy handling of the machine and it rapidly became the model for the Farmall, which was introduced in 1924. Benjamin's prototype was destroyed but a

photograph survived and Harry Lee used it as a blueprint to construct a full-size replica in the winter of 1990-91.

The original prototype was apparently thrown together rapidly. Channel iron frame rails were simply bolted together and other components appear to have been hastily assembled. What tractor engineers liked about the tractor was that it had differential brakes and high axle clearance required for row crop work, plus it was powerful, light and simple.

Lee faithfully copied the tractor in every detail. All four wheels were hand-built as were many other components on the home-built tractor, which runs like a new machine. Lee takes it to antique tractor shows around the country.

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Witt and wife ride in a small 2-wheeled cart that trails behind 14 hp riding mower.

He Turned His Garden Tractor Into A "Horse"

"We have a lot of fun with it in parades," says Arthur Witt, Claflin, Kan., about the horse-drawn cart he put together, complete with a riding mower controlled by "reins" just like a horse.

Witt and his wife ride on an old bus seat mounted on a small 2-wheeled cart that trails behind the 14-hp. mower. The tractor has hydrostatic drive so a single pedal controls forward and reverse. He rigged up a foot control by running a rod from the tractor's foot pedal to the back of the

tractor. He then attached short lengths of chain to either side of the handlebar type steering handle and ran leather reins back to the trailer-mounted seat.

"We call our horse-tractor 'Herkimer' and we even carry a broom and shovel to 'clean up after him' when we run in parades," says Witt, noting that when Herkimer isn't on parade he's still used to mow the lawn.

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