



Ram

Ewe

Lamb

# SHEEP

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## Background Information

Sheep have played an important role in human history. They were among the first species to be domesticated and provided both meat for food and wool for clothing. Sheep skin hides were also used for clothing and shelter. The weaving and felting of wool were among the first arts to be developed.

The Spanish who founded old Santa Fe, New Mexico, are thought to have brought the multicolored sheep, from which the flocks belonging to the Native American Navajos are descended. The first British sheep were brought to Virginia in 1609 by the London Company.

Common breeds of sheep are Rambouillet, Columbia, Corriedale and Dorset, all white-faced breeds, and Suffolk and Hampshire, the black-faced breeds.

## Growth and Feeding

Female sheep are called ewes and male sheep are rams. The offspring of a ewe and a ram is a lamb. Ewes are usually bred in the fall and give birth in the late winter and early spring. When a ewe gives birth, it is called lambing. Ewes are pregnant for about five months before they give birth. They usually give birth to one or two lambs, but sometimes they give birth to three or four lambs at a time. Lambs nurse their mothers for two to three months and then they are weaned. Lambs are sold to market at approximately four to seven months of age and weigh between 115 and 140 pounds.

Like cattle, sheep are ruminants which means they have four compartments in their stomachs. Sheep do not have

any upper front teeth. When eating forages such as grass and alfalfa, they close the lower teeth against the dental pad of the upper jaw. Ewe lambs and wethers (neutered males) that are raised for meat are also fed grains such as corn, oats and grain sorghum.

## Sheep Dogs

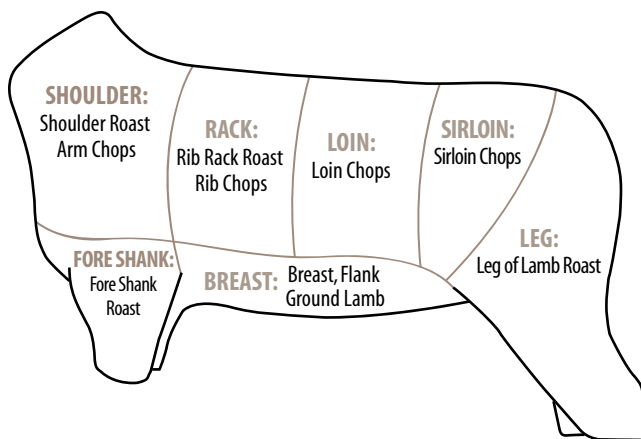
Dogs often play an important role in sheep production. There are two kinds of sheep dogs: guarding dogs and working dogs. Breeds such as Great Pyrenees, Komondors, or Anatolians guard the sheep herd from other animals that prey on them, such as coyotes. The dogs stay with the sheep at all times and scare wild animals away.

Working dogs, like Border Collies and Australian Shepherds, are born with herding instincts and herd sheep from one place to another. These dogs are also very intelligent and eager to work.

## Shearing

The body of a sheep is covered with wool. Certain breeds of sheep have higher quality wool. Once a year the wool is removed by shearing. After shearing, the wool is carded to untangle and straighten the fibers and remove any remaining dirt. The wool is now a long, soft untwisted strand of fiber ready to be spun into yarn. The yarn is weaved or knitted into fabric. Wool is a natural renewable product that is easily dyed any color. It is used to make sweaters, coats, scarves and rugs, etc. An average fleece from one sheep will provide enough fabric for one wool suit.

## Products



## Cuts of Lamb

Lamb is the meat from young sheep that are under one year of age. Lamb chops, rack of lamb and leg of lamb are some of the more important cuts of lamb.

## Other Products

Lanolin is an oil extracted from sheep's wool and used in cosmetics and lubricants. Wool that is needle-punched and/or bonded is used as mulch to plant seeds; to clean up oil spills and grease around machinery; for insulation in homes and buildings; and as an inter-liner in winter clothing. Other by-products from sheep include piano keys, candles, shampoo, fertilizer, chewing gum, and medicines such as rattlesnake antivenin.

