



For more information on Florida's
sheep industry, contact:

Division of Animal Industry

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FLORIDA'S SHEEP INDUSTRY



Florida Department of
Agriculture and Consumer Services

Past

The sheep industry in the United States has experienced a gradual rebirth over the last decade. Congress recognized the importance of sheep ranching by establishing the National Sheep Industry Improvement Center (NSIIC) in the 1997 Farm Bill. The chief mandate of NSIIC is to assist the small ruminant industry by enhancing the production and marketing of sheep and their products in the United States with grant program funds to improve the species and strengthen the industry overall.

Florida producers have been trying to meet the demand from new immigrants and an increase in people who traditionally prefer mutton, lamb, or chevon over beef, poultry, or pork. Sheep (like goats) are a multipurpose livestock species raised for meat, fiber, skins, and milk. While almost all sheep serve more than one purpose, most breeds have a major use in meat, fiber, and dairy production. Wool breeds (like the Suffolk, Dorset, and Southdown) are principally used for fiber production and produce wools of different grades. The Florida and Gulf Coast native breeds are used largely for that purpose. Breeds that are raised for meat production tend to grow fast and produce muscular carcasses making them ideal for the small, limited resource farmer. The hair sheep (Katahdin, St. Croix), and the Florida (or Gulf Coast) native are popular market-grade animals. These breeds have a history of good survivability in Florida and are becoming accepted

by traditional sheep producers. There are even breeds raised for milk (e.g., East Friesian, Lacaune and Awassi) that are gaining popularity in the United States.

Future

Sheep husbandry offers an entry into agriculture unmatched by other domestic livestock and crop farming systems, and because the number of producers in Florida is on the rise. The increased herd numbers are generating interest in the health challenges, such as internal parasite control, nutritional deficiencies, and reproductive problems that face the industry today. Education is the key to the growth of the sheep industry in Florida. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services will continue to work with producer groups and industry representatives to address these and other issues through training meetings, representation on the state's Animal Industry Technical Council, and other initiatives.

Interesting facts about Sheep

- The eastern part of the United States has the greatest number of small, farm-flock operations.
- Sheep eat woody and broad-leaved plants, as well as noxious weeds and grasses, making them useful in reducing the incidence of wildfires.
- American wool is used to make tennis balls.

Rules and Regulations regarding Sheep

- Florida requires that all sheep involved in travel or commerce (of any kind) be identified according to the Scrapie Eradication Uniform Methods and Rules (APHIS 91-55-066, Florida Administrative Code 5C-29).
- To bring sheep into Florida, a health certificate and individual identification is required (Florida Administrative Code 5C-3).
- A health certificate and individual identification is required for all sheep presented for exhibition (Florida Administrative Codes 5C-4 and 5C-29).

