

A GUIDE FOR SHEEP AND FARM LIFE

# THE SHEPHERD

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# SHOW RING TEXELS



Victoria Subik exhibiting at 2013 The Farmers Museum Junior Livestock Show, Cooperstown NY. Photo courtesy Hilltop Acres Farm of Fonda, NY.



Breann Wilcox handling a sheep owned by her grandpa, Ron Wilcox of Leslie, MI. Photo courtesy Niki Fisher.



Amy Marquette, 2013 Minnesota State Fair, All Other Meat Breeds Champion Ewe FFA. Photo courtesy Lisa Marquette of Buffalo, Minnesota.



Vivian Nipper and Ammarae Broncheau with the Fisher Texels Grand Champion Ram and Best of Breed-for Texels- at the 2013 National Texel Show in Sedalia, MO. Photo courtesy of Niki Fisher.



Grand Champion Junior Texel Ewe and Grand Champion Texel Ewe at The Farmers Museum Junior Livestock Show, Cooperstown NY. Photo courtesy Hilltop Acres Farm of Fonda, NY.



# Texels

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Photos by Hilltop Acres Farm of Fonda, New York.  
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at [www.facebook.com/pages/Hilltop-Acres-Farm/386450128096275](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Hilltop-Acres-Farm/386450128096275)).

“It is time that the Texels get the recognition that they have earned and deserve” said the judge from Shedd, Oregon when he gave his reasons for the placings of the Texel market lamb class at the 2009 Indiana State Fair.

Texels have come a long way since they were imported in 1984 from the Netherlands, into the United States by U.S. Meat Animal Research Center (“US Marc,” the USDA research farm located at Clay Center, Nebraska). There were at least five other individuals or investor groups that also imported live animals or embryos into the United States. Most of those early breeders or investors had considerable financial losses and never really could overcome all of their problems. Some of the bloodlines of those initial imports still appear in some of the pedigrees today when going back into the third generation. The US Marc import is the most recognizable import and was the foundation of most of the U.S. Texels today. US Marc continues to do extensive research on building a superior commercial ewe and the Texel ram excels as the terminal sire to use on those ewes.

Early importations of semen were by Dennis Gourley, DVM, of Iowa. More current importations were undertaken by Fisher Texels of Idaho in 2005, and by Portland Prairie Texels of Minnesota from 2003 to 2009. Fisher’s semen was imported from Australia and New Zealand and the Portland Prairie semen

was imported from the UK.

The genetic pool of Texels in the United States is very small and it has created a difficult problem for the growth and expansion of the breed. The British Texel is very popular in the United States. However the U.S. government has restricted the semen imports from the UK, mostly due to health issues with cattle.



Texel ram lamb. Texel lambs are hardy and fast growers.

The demand for Texel breeding stock far exceeds the supply, especially east of the Mississippi. Gene and Niki Fisher of Fisher Texels in Idaho own the largest flock of purebred Texels in the United States with a usual inventory of 150 ewes, and normally sell out of rams and ewes each year.

Tom and Karin Watson of Silverdale Farms in Hermiston, Oregon, recognized some problem areas for the Texel rams in the western range areas and moved to correct them. Tom was the head buyer for Superior Farms for many years, and knew the value of the Texel superior carcass. They had been selling Suffolk rams to the range flocks for several years and understood the problems of crossing the Texel ram on the western white-face ewes for the range flock. They developed their Silverdale rams by crossing Texel rams on old-style Suffolk ewes to correct the problems that the Texels were having. Due to their short legs, the Texel ram did not have the capability to

“It Is Time That The Texels Get The Recognition That They Have Earned And Deserve”

travel the daily distance that is necessary for range flocks. Their white-face color nearly matches that of the white-face range ewes, making it difficult to quick identity (for the selection of replacement ewe lambs) as they come through the sorting chute. The Silverdale rams have longer legs, which makes for better daily travel and it gave the ewe lamb either a black face or a brockle face for quick identity in the chute. As the Watsons have been doing loin-eye scanning for over 20 years, and by tight selection, their Silverdale rams retained the superior muscling of the Texel.

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East of the Mississippi River, the market is totally different. In the West the desired finish weight is in the 155 lb. range. The Midwestern and Eastern market range is more in the 60 lb. to 110 lb. range, and that is the weight range where the Texel market lamb excels due to their early muscling. There is the misconception that the Texel lamb is double-muscled, leading to very tough meat. The Texel lamb carries the myostatin gene which makes the meat very tender and very desirable.

As the ethnic trade has pressured the lamb market, the demand for Texel breeding stock increased. Due to the strong influence of Katahdins as the ewe base on many of farm flocks, the use of Texel rams on the Katahdins as the terminal sire has become very popular. For many years, the lambs from farm flocks were sold solely on weight and the concentration was on early growth. As the market for selling lamb directly to the consumer exploded, the awareness of the producer of the various cuts and their values went up. So did the demand for Texel rams as the terminal sire. As the increased demand for commercial Texel rams went up, so did the demand for purebred ewes to start new flocks. If someone today is looking for 10 purebred ewes to start a Texel ewe flock, it is going to be very difficult to find them. When someone is able to start a flock, most likely they will retain the ewe lambs for a few years to increase the size of their own flock. Many have eased into



Triplet Texel ram lamb on pasture.



Twin Texel ram lamb on pasture.

Texels by crossbreeding for a period of time. Fisher Texels has been taking 40-50 additional ewe lambs along with their regular consignment to the National Texel Show and Sale, held annually at the Midwest Stud Ram Sale in Sedalia, Missouri. It has helped a little to fill some of the demand for the start-up of small flocks in the Midwest. Bob Adams of Adams Texels in Indiana has helped to spread the ewes, in small groups of two to five, to help the start-up flocks. He has also represented many absentee buyers at the National Sale in buying seed stock for start-up flocks. It is fairly easy to coordinate a ride from Sedalia to almost any part of the United States, which is very helpful. He tries to keep up on the inventory of Texels for sale across the nation and works with buyers to fill, at least, part of their needs.

The U.S. genetic base and the availability of Texel breeding ewes is so small

in comparison to the demand that it has been a slow process to increase the numbers of breeding stock available. When the U.S. government relaxes import restrictions and opens the borders for the movement of semen, embryos, and live animals, it will be a major help. Some of the new and younger breeders will most likely take on the challenge of artificial insemination and embryo transfer. Once that happens, the genetic base will diversify and new genetics will be readily available. It will take only a few years for small flocks to reach their limit on replacement numbers and begin to sell females. Some have already reached that point. As more Texel ewes come on the open market, it will relax the availability, and the Texel breeding stock market will correct itself and will be able to meet the demand.

The future for the Texels is bright. They are finally "getting the recognition that they have earned and deserve."

Bob Adams is a past president of the Texel Sheep Breeders Society. He started raising Texels in 1996 with the purchase of some crossbred Texel ewes. In 1999, he purchased his first purebred Texel ram. He and his son, Brent, own Adams Texels and also US Sheep Company LLC, which maintains a flock of Katahdins. He is from Morristown, Indiana. He can be reached at bobadams@mcclink.com. ■



Three Texel ram lambs on pasture. Texels are very easy keepers and great at foraging on grass.



Three-to-seven year-old Texel ewes on pasture, requiring no grain.



A triplet Texel ewe lamb. With several sets of triplets this year, Hilltop Acres Farm reports a nearly 200% lambing percentage.