

Texel Times

The newsletter featuring Texel Sheep – the breed with exceptional muscle development

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Pictured above: A pasture of Texel/Suffolk cross sheep in Northern Germany. Turn to page 8 to read about the Pike family's trip where they encountered Texel sheep!

The name of the game is GENETICS

In this edition of the Texel Times, we look at one of the principal concerns of Texel breeders: how to acquire top-notch genetics to grow your flock.

There are a few Texel breeders in the U.S. who have imported semen from abroad, but the process can be challenging. We look at this issue further on pages 2-4.

Look for a profile of Kerry and Jason Richardson in our continuing "Get to Know a Breeder" section and read about encountering Texels during a family trip to Germany on page 8.

Thank you for your feedback on the Texel Times. As always, don't hesitate to contact me at breslaufarms@gmail.com.



SAY EWE!!

The Texel Sheep Breeders Association is ready to accept submissions for the 2012 photo contest. Please look for details on page 7.

Growing the Gene Pool

By Kristin Pike

Raising a specialty breed, like Texel sheep, can be challenging and tricky when it comes to broadening and diversifying genetics. The American Texel genetic pool is dependent upon bringing in genetics from other countries where Texels are more prominent. Several breeders in the US have attempted to import live animals or Texel semen and know that it can be a challenging, complicated, expensive and time-consuming process.

Charlie and Deb Wray of Portland Prairie Texels in Caledonia, Minnesota, started importing semen in 1998. At that time, Charlie got in touch with the Dutch Texel Association and found several rams of interest. The Wrays were planning a trip to Northern Europe and decide to visit the breeders of these Texel rams. Charlie says it was helpful meeting with the breeders in person to work out the details of collection and what paperwork would be required by the US Department of Agriculture. He adds, however, that the Internet has become such a useful tool in locating and evaluating Texel rams and breeders abroad, that traveling is really not required.

The Wrays brought in two additional shipments of Texel semen in 2004 and 2006, this time from England. In 2009, working with Kerry Richardson, they brought in straws from three different English rams.

The Wray's success in artificially inseminating their sheep is helped by Charlie's line of work – he is a bovine embryo transfer veterinarian. Sheep must be artificially inseminated laparoscopically due to the nature of their cervix. Charlie has his own laparoscope he is able to use and reports a success rate of approximately 70 percent.

The Wrays are pleased with the genetics they have been able to bring in and add to their flock. "I'm interested in rate of gain, high muscle depth and fat

depth," Charlie says of what he was looking for in Texel rams. "Good feet and legs are important to me as well as muscularity of the back end."

The Wrays' work has paid off, too. Rams and ewes sired from the imported semen have garnered top dollar at the National Show and Sale. "[One year], at the national sale, we had a bunch of them that sold pretty well. That paid for semen for a couple years," Charlie says. He says he sells his animals for between \$500 and \$2000. Charlie estimates that his last joint import with Richardson in 2009 cost \$10,000, considering breeder fees, shipping costs, collection and government permits. The shipment yielded about 220 straws. "The biggest expense is going to be for the breeder and the collection center," Charlie says.

For those who would like to try to import Texel semen, the beginning steps include finding a breeder you would like to work with and applying for import permits from the USDA. More information can be found on the Website www.aphis.usda.gov. From the home page, click on "import-export" and then "live animals." You can also call the USDA representative for your state for more information or assistance.

Pictured above: Deb Wray is holding the foundation British-genetics ewe from Charlie and Deb Wray's flock. She was born of genetics from Tinwald A-One (imported by Ron Erdman) and a Dutch-sired ewe.

Imported semen must be accompanied by a health report on the animal from which it comes. A veterinary health certificate must be made from a veterinarian in the country of origin.



Breeders must then find an airline that will carry the semen tank in liquid nitrogen. US regulations require that the flight be non-stop from country of origin to the US destination. USDA shipments can come into major airports like JFK, LAX or Chicago. The shipment will be examined by a USDA veterinarian and can then be transported to your farm.

“There’s a lot of things that you have to get lined up – the shipping, the testing, making sure everyone gets their papers signed,” Charlie Wray says. But the process is a necessity for Texel breeders in the U.S. “We need genetics all the time,” Charlie says. “You need new blood if you’re going to keep doing this.”

The Fishers, of Fishers Texels, also tried their hand at importing semen. They chose to bring in semen from Australia. Niki Fisher shares their adventure in the following article.

Charlie Wray recommends working with breeders who are part of the British Texel Sheep Society, since the organization has compiled large amounts of information on each ram in the organization. “The UK has one of the best breed societies in the world, I think, as far as Texels are concerned,” he says. Charlie did most of his research on his last three UK imports on the British Texel website: www.texel.co.uk

At left: One of Charlie and Deb Wray’s AI-sired lambs on pasture. At right: An artificially-bred ram from Fisher’s Texels. This ram sold at the national Show in 2008 and became reserve champion at the Canadian Royal Winter Show.

Fisher’s Texels: Bridging the Gap Between Australia and Idaho

By Niki Fisher

In 1998, Fisher Texels came to be. This was the year that, after considerable searching, we had found some percentage Texel ewes for sale here in Idaho. By that December, we decided that this was the sheep breed for us and purchased 25 registered ewes from Robert Dunn, Snake River Texel Project in Wyoming. These 25 girls were just a few short years from USMARC where the first Texels were introduced to the U.S., and formed the basis for our venture into breeding and raising Texel sheep. We still have one ewe from this original purchase. She is 14 years old this year and still producing lambs! In the beginning, even with our limited experience, we were able to purchase some very nice rams from Jim Davis and Jerry Hess. Each of these rams, like the ones we have used in years since, has added many good qualities to their offspring. Since the

Texel breed in the United States has a fairly small genetic pool, we started thinking about adding new genetics through artificial insemination. 2003 brought not only a move from Oregon to Idaho, but also made web-surfing a tool that would help in our search for semen. This search found us "paging" through the Australian Texel Sheep Breeders listings. Now the adventure started for real. Back then, finding semen that met the United States criteria was a bit difficult. Gene and I liked what we saw on Basil Jorgensen's Mertex Texel Stud website and contacted him about the possibility of collecting semen from his Ripper ram. Basil was agreeable to this and the process was started. We were very naïve and just knew that by the next breeding season we would be the proud owners of 100 straws of Ripper semen. Didn't happen. The fall of 2005 found us making the arrangement to have a cryo tank shipped from Australia to the United States. Little did we know that this is also a process. Cryogenic tanks are considered a hazardous materials container and the only airline that would carry one was Quantus with the only Port of Entry on the west coast being San Francisco. Okay, we would just have UPS carry the tank from there to here in Indian Valley. Nope, you have to either pick it up in person or have a broker arrange land shipment for you. We chose the latter. After several phone calls back and forth, the arrangements were made to get the semen home. One funny thing was that the lady that worked as our broker told me that since she was used to working with the company, Siemens, she just thought that someone had spelled the word wrong. After she got over the shock of having to be responsible for frozen sheep semen, she got quite a chuckle out of the whole thing. Now since Gene had been a dairyman in his younger days, he figured that between the two of us and a little help from our veterinarian, we shouldn't have any problems getting 10 ewes bred artificially that fall. Little did we know it is almost impossible to breed a sheep artificially approaching it like a ram does since a ewe has an 'S' shaped cervix. Out of the 10 girls we AI'd, only one settled, which we have since been told was a miracle. The next spring this ewe gave birth to twins, 1 ram and 1 ewe. We were

excited! Of course the ram lamb got stuck in between 2 trees and ended up dying; but the ewe lamb survived and is still in our flock today. After this, we contacted Martin Dally, who at that time taught at UC Davis in the Agriculture Department. Martin came up and AI'd the girls laparoscopically the next year and had an 80% success rate, which is extremely good. These little lambs were adorable! It is amazing that even at birth, you can sometimes tell who the sired a lamb and Ripper definitely leaves his mark on his lambs.

Martin and his wife, Joy, have come several times since to AI our girls. While he hasn't achieved an 80% success rate since, 50% being the norm, the lambs born from AI have added a new dimension and a broader genetic base to our flock.

Martin also had imported some semen from Australia and New Zealand. We have purchased some of this semen and have added 2 more bloodlines by doing this. This year we did not AI, but plan on doing so in 2012. We have 1 Ripper straw left and have purchased semen from Martin to use then.

With the importation of live animals being very difficult, and having the border between the U.S. and Canada closed to importation of sheep, artificial insemination is a very good way to bring in new bloodlines. It has been a journey, but we are very thankful for Basil's willingness to step out in a new area to get the semen ready for export; for Martin's skill in AI'ing and for these sheep that Jesus brought into our lives-as we had never seen raising sheep a possibility until we first purchased our percentage Texel ewes. It's been interesting to say the least.

Get to Know a Texel Breeder

Profiles written by Bob Adams

In this issue we look at father and son team, Kerry and Jason Richardson of Opyde, Illinois. Kerry – a past president of the Texel Sheep Breeders Society – has made his mark on the Texel breed while growing both his own flock and the association. Jason has grown up with the breed, showing Texels in their best light at the Indiana State Fair.



Kerry Richardson, shown at the 2011 National Show and Sale holding his Reserve Grand Champion ram lamb.

Kerry Richardson resides on the family farm, located near Opyde, Illinois, with his wife Barb and one son, Jason. Kerry served 5 years as the President of TSBS and was a catalyst for making a lot of changes and initiating new ideas that were much needed in changing the direction and the progress of the Texel breed.

One of the most significant moves that had a positive effect for both participating breeders and non-participating breeders, was the breeder co-op advertising in *The Shepherd*, *Sheep* and *ASI* publications. It increased the recognition of the Texel breed to commercial producers. The ad appearing on a continuous basis over a period of time, kept the Texel breed in front of the commercial producer. It increased the calls for those that were participating in the sales of rams to the

commercial market.

At the National Show and Sale, Kerry put into place many of the procedures that helped to set the Texel breed apart from most other breeds.

Here are just a few of the changes that were established during his time as the President of the TSBS:

* He was very significant in the establishment of the weight, measurements and the loin eye scan. Even though the loin eye scan had been started at the Springfield sales it was at the sales in Sedalia that it took on significance. Kerry brought his own digital scales and put together an instrument to use in the measurement of the various parts of the sale animals. Barb would enter the weight, measurements and the loin eye scan into the computer prior to the sale. All of the figures were available to prospective buyers at the sale.

Since the time **Jason Richardson** was little, wherever Richardson Texels were shown, he was there.

Jason was always along when Kerry started bringing Texels to the Indiana State Fair. Some of the good, early memories that I have of showing at the Indiana State Fair involve Jason.

-Jason- continued on pg. 7



Jason Richardson, holding his Reserve Grand Champion brood ewe at the 2011 National Show and Sale in Sedalia, MO.

Continued Kerry Richardson...

* He established the brood ewe class and would sometimes bring one of his own brood ewes with a lamb at her side. Some of the higher female prices have come out the brood ewe class.

* The selection of the Supreme Champion (Best of Breed) Texel was established at his suggestion.

* The election process was changed from the election being held at the annual meeting during the National Show. The selection of the board and the officers were limited to those in attendance. It was changed to a ballot being sent to all membership, allowing all members to participate in the election.

* A new set of by-laws was put in place that outlined more comprehensive regulations.

* A new breed standard was put together that helped to define the characteristics of a Texel not only for a judge's use but also for a more uniform set of Texel characteristics for the breeder's use.

* He worked with the web master to design a very attractive and professional website to promote the Texel breed.

Kerry established his Texel flock around 2002 and from the first year on he showed and sold at the National Show and Sale. At the National Show he showed 4 champion rams and 4 reserve champion rams. He showed one champion ewe and 2 reserve champion ewes. He had the top consignment twice. He normally consigns approximately one third of the sale offering.

His Texel flock was not developed by "happenstance" as many flocks are. His selection of breeding stock was not based upon whether they were a champion in the ring, but rather each animal purchased had a specific purpose to fill.

Artificial insemination was tried on a couple of occasions but the results were not satisfactory. Kerry feels that the prices that the buyers are currently willing to pay for breeding stock does not justify the time and money that has to be put into it.

Early on he addressed the OPP problem, head on, in his flock development program. He tested his ewes and orphaned the lambs from the positive ewes. He ran two flocks, a positive and a negative. He culled until the flock was totally negative and then he closed the flock. When purchasing outside rams he buys only

from totally negative flocks.

The Indiana State Fair Texel Show has grown into the largest Texel show in the US. In the initial stages 30 head, three years in a row, had to be placed on exhibition and there had to be 4 breeders represented. After the exhibition period the 30 head rule still remains. He came to Indiana, 3 years, driving almost 5 hours each way. Sometimes the Texels would come in one day, show the next evening and would have to be out of the barn that evening. He would bring his show flock in, work most of the night washing and clipping, and then would show and go home.

At home he is very busy. Not only looking after his flock of 60 ewes consisting of purebred Texels and Texel/Suffolk crosses but he also has 30 head of Angus brood cows. He cuts and bales approximately 200 acres of hay. What is not kept for his own use is sold on the farm to outside buyers. He cuts, rakes and bales the hay himself. The hay operation, mostly round bales, is basically a one-man operation.

While handling the farm operation, he also has a full-time job as a crop adjuster and area supervisor for John Deere Crop Insurance. He has six people working under his supervision. In 2011 they completed over 1500 claims. Barb helps out on the farm but she is also a crop adjuster for another company. She covers an area that extends as far west as Colorado.

Kerry, the Richardson family and Richardson Texels have played a major role in the upward trend of the Texel breed. They deserve a lot of credit and thanks from the other Texel breeders for their efforts in raising awareness of the Texel breed to the level that it is today.

-Jason, continued from Pg. 5

One year, when he was still very small, he had a new pair of black rubber boots that he was very proud of. He was wearing his new boots and he was helping me wash our sheep. I would soap them down and he would rinse them off. He was rinsing the back of one of them and he didn't realize it but he was spraying me right in my face. He never looked up but kept right on rinsing. Later on he came into the show ring leading a lamb - of course wearing his new rubber boots with his pants tucked in. He got tangled up in the lead rope on the halter and the lamb drug him around the ring. He never let go but it was a funny sight to see him, little as he was, hanging on wearing his new rubber boots.

He joined 4H when he became old enough and showed not only sheep but also pigs. He won numerous showmanship classes and won numerous awards with his sheep and also his pigs.

In high school he was an accomplished wrestler. He is currently completing his senior year of high school and has already joined the Marines. He will be leaving at the end of July. According to his dad, Kerry, Jason has wanted to be a Marine for a long time. He will be missed at the shows. We all wish him well in his career in the Marines. His future is bright but in today's world he is taking on a dangerous mission and we respect him for that.

Thank you, Jason, for a lot of good times and a lot of good memories.

Get Ready for the 2012 Texel Photo Contest!!

The Texel Sheep Breeders Society announces the 2012 Texel Photo Contest! There are two categories for the contest. Submissions to the first category: "Critics Choice" should be photographs that best showcase the Texels' attributes. The second category: "Breeders Choice," is for fun pictures with Texels - pictures that are fun, beautiful, comical or just plain sweet. The submission deadline for photos is May 15, 2012. Please send photographs to JoLee Marquette at texelphotocontest@gmail.com or send directly to JoLee at 403 66th St. SW, Waverly, MN, 55390. The pictures will then be posted on **hazelstreetcreative.com**.

Voting will be by ballot. Ballots will be sent in the mail with instructions to go to the [hazelstreetcreative](http://hazelstreetcreative.com) website, review the photos and return your ballot to JoLee Marquette postmarked by June 1, 2012. The winner for each category will be announced at the National Show and Sale. The winning photographs will be featured at the National Show and the winning photographers will each receive a \$100 prize courtesy of Breslau Farms Texels. The winning photos will also be featured in TSBS promotional material. All photos will become property of the Texel Sheep Breeders Society and will not be returned to the sender. When submitting photos, please indicate to which category you are submitting. There is a limit of two submissions per breeder per category.

Please contact JoLee at texelphotocontest@gmail.com with any questions.

A rugged terrain, a rugged sheep

By Kristin Pike

The farmland of Northern Germany, bordering the North Sea, is rugged terrain. Flat expanses of land reclaimed from the sea by constructed dikes, are ideal to grow sugar beets, cabbage and Brussels sprouts. The windswept landscape is also an oasis for such stocky, sturdy sheep as the Texels.

In early December, my family traveled to northern Germany to visit friends who live on a dairy farm in the rural German county of Ditmarschen, near Hamburg. Our friends had visited us in Pennsylvania several years earlier and commented how surprised they were to see Texel sheep in our barnyard. Texels are the preferred breed in northern Germany and one of the families visiting us had been cultivating a Texel flock for years!

When we visited our friends in Germany, we made a point to go to the farm of Horst and Renate Sachau. They have a flock of approximately 200 sheep, mostly a Texel cross with Suffolk. The Sachaus have a few pure bred Texels remaining in their flock, but have been breeding in Suffolk, primarily to address ease of birthing issues. Horst explained that in Northern Germany, since the majority of Texel flocks are grazing flocks, it is important to have easy birthing since the farmer isn't able to keep watch over the flock at all times. The Texel breed is still highly desirable, however. The Ditmarschen climate requires a hearty sheep that can brave the howling winds that come off the North Sea. The region can be bitterly cold in winter, with several feet of snow. The sheep do well grazing the marshy, salt flats along the North Sea coast as well as the remnants of crop harvests such as cabbage. Locals say the meat from North Sea region sheep is particularly desirable. According to some, the sheep's diet of salt flat grasses



Purebred Texels still remain in Horst and Renate's Texel/Suffolk cross flock, seen here grazing the marshy fields of North Germany. Below: The Sachau's Texel/Suffolk flock.

actually makes the meat taste saltier.

Our hosts took us on a tour of their region. We had several stops to walk along the dikes holding the ocean back from the land. In mid-December temperatures stayed around the high 30s, but the wind coming off the North Sea was a true arctic blast. My husband and I gained a new appreciation for Texels as we struggled to look into the wind, whipping around us at 40+ mph. Beyond the dike, Texels grazed as if it were a spring day, their thick coats and skin protecting them from the environment.