

The Majestic Jacob Sheep

Jacob sheep are a very ancient, domesticated breed. Their strikingly impressive horns and spotted fleece have likely contributed to their popularity and survival. Documentation throughout history indicates that the breed probably originated in what is now Syria some three thousand years ago. Pictorial evidence traces movements of this breed through North Africa, Sicily, Spain, and on to England. Jacob sheep graced the large estates and country homes of England for many centuries. Jacob Sheep were originally imported into the United States and Canada in the early 1900s for use in game parks and zoos. These early flocks were later bought by private individuals. The genetic pool was greatly enhanced by additional importations from Britain during the 1950s and 1960s.



The American Jacob sheep is distinct from its British counterpart and has not undergone improved breeding to satisfy the commercial marketplace. American Jacobs have a smaller frame and more primitive body shape than the British Jacobs. Known in the distant past as "Piebald" or "Spanish" sheep, there are several historical narratives about Jacob sheep origins, including being direct descendants of the flock of sheep acquired by Jacob, as in the biblical account in Genesis, chapter 30, or that they were washed ashore from shipwrecks during the attempted invasion of the Spanish Armada during the reign of Elizabeth I. The name "Jacob" was possibly introduced in the mid-1800s, and remains of mysterious origins, along with the breed origin itself.



The Jacob Sheep Breeders Association (JSBA) was formed in 1988 through the encouragement and guidance of the American Minor Breeds Conservancy (now the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy). The purpose of JSBA is to provide a place for breeders of Jacob Sheep to register their animals, communicate with one another and to centralize the distribution of information. Its mission is to ensure the conservation of this breed through inspection, registration, and education.

The Jacob Sheep Breeders Association is of prime importance in maintaining this majestic and ancient breed in its present form. We welcome your questions about this unique breed and encourage you to join. For additional information visit our website at: www.jsba.org or contact a local JSBA member or the JSBA Membership Secretary:

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About the Breed

The Jacob is a small to medium size breed. Adult ewes range from 80-120 pounds, while rams range from 120 to 180 pounds. Ideally, coloration of this spotted breed should be 60% white with 40% random, distinct, black or lilac (grayish) spots or patches over the body. The preferred facial coloration consists of a pair of colored eye patches and a white blaze extending to a colored muzzle. Legs can be spotted or white, while the hooves should be black or striped. The legs are free from wool, as is the portion of the head in front of the horns.

Jacob sheep are carriers of the polycerate gene, allowing them to produce two, four, or six horns, with both rams and ewes having horns. The most spectacular representatives of the breed are rams with four well balanced horns often reaching 30 inches or more. Jacob fleeces are a delight for handspinners and connoisseurs of natural color! They are light and open, weighing between three and six pounds with a staple length of three to seven inches. Fleeces parts easily, exposing a soft, medium grade wool. Due to the spotting, the wool can be spun into a complete spectrum from white through gray lilac to black.



Handsome and hardy, the Jacob is ideal for both the small flock owner and the larger breeder. A small and efficient breed, more Jacobs can be maintained per acre than larger, modern breeds. They are easily handled and show a good resistance to parasites and foot problems. Ewes lamb easily and the lambs are up and nursing quickly. Carcasses are lean and flavorful with a minimum of waste from slaughter to table, while tanned hides, and horns for buttons and walking stick handles provide additional valued products.

What to look for in a Jacob Sheep

Jacob Sheep have many unique phenotypical (physical) characteristics. In any breed it is difficult to find an animal that will qualify as "ideal". Being mindful of that, we present the following recommendations to help you select good Jacob breeding stock. The ability to exercise your own preferences, as in percentage of color, number of horns, spotted or white legs, large patches or small spots, etc., allows you to have your flock look exactly like you want, not the same as everyone else's flock. It is also necessary to maintain the genetic diversity that exists today if this Old World breed is going to continue into the future.

Recommendations to follow when choosing Jacob breeding stock:

- Choose a ewe lamb at least four months of age - a ram lamb at least 6 months of age
- Horns are evident at four months - choose an evenly balanced set
- Black or striped horns - never white
- Good facial markings
- No wool forward of the horn or below the hocks
- No evidence of split upper eyelid deformity
- Color pattern within the Breed Standard
- Evenly growing fleece with little kemp and britchiness
- Open, springy and soft fleece with a sheen to it
- White legs with or without spots-not all black legs
- Black or striped hooves - not white
- Bodies with well-placed legs without tendency toward bow-leggedness, cow hocking, knock knees or a narrow body

Remember, it will be difficult to find an animal that meets **ALL** of the Breed Standard "desirable traits" criteria. For those who are new to Jacob sheep, the best advice is to look at as many Jacobs as possible, identify the different characteristics, then select animals which have the characteristics that are important to you. You will have a flock that reflects your preferences, not someone else's.

*For a copy of the complete Breed Standard please contact the JSBA Membership Secretary or visit our website at: www.jsba.org



Join JSBA today and have a part in maintaining, conserving and appreciating Jacob sheep! This brochure is provided courtesy of JSBA and Member Farm:

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The majestic Jacob Sheep is a special addition to flocks throughout North America. Unique, different, regal, useful, hardy - there are few breeds that excite the interest of others as does this breed. Jacobs offer character and interest to any farm.