



UNDERSTANDING THE BREED STANDARD FOR JACOB SHEEP

JSBA INSPECTION COMMITTEE

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The Jacob Sheep Breeders Association (JSBA) Inspection Committee has prepared this introductory document and the associated fact sheets to assist members in the use of the Jacob Breed Standard. This includes information about how inspectors *interpret* standards that are more subjective, or that may be confusing. Please note that this information and the associated fact sheets do not *change* the Breed Standard; such changes must be approved by the membership. We expect that this material will be modified by the committee in the future as the need arises.

BACKGROUND

The JSBA bylaws define the basic purpose and goals of the Association, which includes:

To develop a breed standard which will serve to identify and register those individual sheep which qualify as Jacob.

In reading the Breed Standard, it is helpful to remember that when JSBA was organized, there was no purebred Jacob registry in the U.S. Therefore, those who purchased sheep had to rely on their general appearance, and whatever pedigree and background information was provided by the seller to identify “purebred” Jacobs. The JSBA Breed Standard, developed soon after formation of the Association, thus serves the important purpose of defining those sheep considered to be “registerable” and to provide some guidelines for breeders who are selecting either unregistered or registered stock. The Standard is also used in a general way when judging registered sheep at shows, but was not developed for this purpose.

The Breed Standard includes three levels for each listed attribute: “Desirable” (what we hope to see in purebred Jacobs); “Acceptable but Less Desirable” (these traits will not prevent registration); and “Unacceptable/Disqualifying Traits.” The Standard attempts to define these three categories as specifically as possible – for example, an unacceptable fleece is defined by specific high and low micron counts. However, some portions of the Standard are of necessity more general or qualitative, for example “*excessive* quilted appearance” or “*excessive* freckling in the white wool of young animals.” Other standards provide specific numerical values (e.g. less than 15% black or white is unacceptable) but may be difficult to measure on the animal and thus is open to interpretation. The fact sheets prepared by the Inspection Committee are intended to provide additional guidance for the existing standards.

AN INSPECTOR'S OVERVIEW OF THE BREED STANDARD

The breed standard describes many of the physical characteristics of Jacob Sheep in order to describe a purebred Jacob, and a range of desirable, less desirable, and unacceptable traits. Although not listed this way in the Standard, these traits include three general (and overlapping) categories:

- **BREED CHARACTERISTICS.** These included a general description of the unique appearance of Jacob sheep: their color and marking patterns, horns, type of wool, and body type as it may differ from other breeds (e.g. the sloping rump). The standard supports consideration of these characteristics which distinguish Jacob sheep as a unique breed.
- **TRAITS RELATED TO CONFORMATION.** All sheep breeds share a similar body structure. In general, the JSBA Breed Standard indicates that defects in conformation that make the animal unsound for breeding are unacceptable (for example, an extreme swayback in a ram – although this is not specifically cited in the standard). The Standard also highlights things that Jacob breeders may consider somewhat differently, e.g. an acceptance of slight cow-hocking. It also differentiates between Jacobs and other breeds – e.g. “large, loosely-attached udders” (normal in some other breeds) are considered unacceptable in a purebred Jacob.
- **TRAITS THAT HARM THE HEALTH OF THE ANIMAL.** A few breed characteristics may also, in some instances, negatively impact the health of the animal. These include Split Upper Eyelid Deformity (SUED) which while associated with the 4-horned trait may, when extreme, irritate the eye; and horns that grow into the face of an animal. The Breed Standard is not designed to eliminate these characteristics but does limit registration of animals that show an unacceptable form of the trait.

Overall, the Breed Standard describes a wide range of desirable and acceptable traits that support registration of an animal, consistent with the goal of maintaining as much genetic diversity as possible within the breed, and its unique appearance.

Does the Breed Standard Define the “Ideal” Jacob? The Breed Standard describes those traits that are desirable in a Jacob and, in a general sense, the more “desirable” traits that an animal has, the better. However, each breeder will weigh among the most important characteristics based on his or her own goals and preferences. The fleece character may be much more important for those who actively use or market wool, overall appearance and markings may be more important to those who exhibit or show Jacobs either in 4H or at wool festivals, and so on. For most breeders of purebred Jacobs, either a trait that indicates crossbreeding in the animal’s background, or a trait that has the potential to adversely impact the health of the animal, is more significant than a relatively minor conformation fault.

In addition, however, many positive characteristics of the Jacob breed cannot be evaluated by visual comparison with a breed standard. These include things like mothering ability, hardiness, temperament, and disease resistance. Since these include some of the most important Jacob

characteristics, it is ultimately up to the breeder to define the “ideal” animals for his or her flock. Thus, while the standard defines a “registerable” animal and also a desirable one, it cannot be said to identify the “ideal” Jacob.

FLEXIBILITY IN THE BREED STANDARD AND THE INSPECTION/REGISTRATION PROCESS

Jacob breeders may wonder why the Breed Standard is not more specific regarding some traits, such as freckling. The Standard is written to encourage diversity, and not to fail sound animals that show consistency with a description of a purebred Jacob. There is a degree of flexibility in the standard which allows a fairly diverse range of Jacob types to be included.

In addition, the Appendix Certified (AC) category is provided to allow preservation of the genetics from ewes that nearly meet the standard but demonstrate some unacceptable traits. If the undesirable traits are carried through to a second generation, registration may be limited.

Finally, because the Standard is somewhat subjective, each animal is always evaluated by at least two inspectors, with a third in the event of a disagreement between the first two. Any decision of the inspectors may be appealed, in which case the full committee votes on that registration. The appeal also provides an opportunity for the owner/breeder to provide additional information supporting registration of the animal. This includes “invisible” traits, such as the animal is the last of a special bloodline, an adult ewe consistently throws and successfully raises triplets, or the animal is representative of a line that is special for some other reason. Information of this nature can always be submitted with a registration application but should be submitted with an appeal, if applicable.

COMPLETED FACT SHEETS

Fact Sheets on the following topics have been drafted or finalized as of the above date. As they are completed, they will be posted on the JSBA website (www.jsba.org) and may be downloaded and printed for your JSBA Guidebook.

- [Color Percentage](#)
- [Split Upper Eyelid Deformity](#)
- [Excessive Quilting](#)
- [Excessive Freckling](#)
- [Acceptable and Unacceptable Horns](#)
- [Use of the Appendix Certified Category](#)