

## Each Spring we buy lambs.

Each Spring we buy about 25 lambs to raise.

Since Gail likes to keep a small flock year-round, that means we have about 30 lambs to sell each Fall.

As with the other species we raise, we like variety.

There are hundreds of breeds of sheep.

Like cattle and hogs, the historic US breeds originated in England, with a few from France.

Because we raise our lambs for meat, we buy crossbred lambs.

Crossbred animals exhibit “hybrid vigor”.

That means they are generally healthier.

Our sheep are grass-fed with a small amount of local grain.

The grain is used primarily as a management/handling tool.



The **first photo** shows the majority of this year’s flock.

The black, spotted and white sheep are members of Gail’s permanent flock.

Those are Katalin, a breed of “hair sheep”.

Hair sheep do not produce a coat of wool.

Actually, wool is “hair” also.

It is just “special” hair.

Wool was for millennia the primary reason to raise sheep.

It is now of low value.

In fact, it is so hard to sell that for most small sheep growers like us, wool is a nuisance.

The cost of shearing a sheep each spring exceeds the value of the wool, if the wool can be sold at all.

In all times previous, wool was a highly valued commodity.

Since the end of WWII, plastics have replaced wool almost completely.

Except for specialty or high-end uses, wool is out.

The **Katahdin sheep breed** originated from crossing the Wiltshire Horn, Suffolk and St. Croix breeds.

Katahdin were developed in Maine and named after a mountain in Maine.

They are smaller than most and produce only one, rarely two lambs.

Katalin sheep are healthy, gentle and easy keepers.

Their significant advantage is that they do not produce wool.

That alone makes them the fastest growing, in numbers, breed in the US.

**The second photo** shows some of the variety in our crossbred lambs.

The lamb on the left has basic Suffolk markings, The Suffolk breed was developed in England. It is the largest sized US meat breed, quite popular in the US, drooping ears.

Suffolk sheep are often used for cross breeding to impart size.

The center lamb has some Dorset breeding. The right lamb shows Corriedale or Romney bloodline.

The Corriedale or Romney bloodline shows even better in the white-faced lamb of the **third photo**.



The **fourth photo** is of one of Gail's Katalin ewes.

It was born here.

Note that it has a tail.

All lambs are born with tails.

It is customary to dock, (cut) the tails of lambs soon after birth.

In fact, docking is so ingrained in sheep raising that you may not have seen a sheep with a tail before.

In my opinion, the reasons for tail docking are not all that good.

The best reason applies to breeds that grow heavy wool.

The wool can collect manure which can then become home to a painful fly colony.

The risk is low for animals like ours that are raised in clean open pastures.

This ewe is naturally clean.

The lambs we buy almost always have docked tails, unfortunately.

As with pigs, I try to buy from breeders that do not dock tails, but the choices are limited.



The **fifth photo** gives a good comparison of the Suffolk type lambs and the Shropshire lamb in the upper right.

The Shropshire has a totally black face and head, a narrower face and droopier black ears.

The three Suffolk appearing lambs in this photo have a tuft of white wool on their foreheads.

The lamb in the lower center is clearly a “mutt”.

Although it has blended features it is a fine healthy meat lamb.



The **sixth photo** shows a Hampshire appearing lamb.

This **seventh photo** is of an Icelandic sheep from a previous year.

Icelandic sheep are currently quite popular but I do not understand why.

Unless it is as pets.

They are quite small and do not produce much meat.

They are hardy.

**The eighth photo** shows some of the flock relaxing in one of their pasture sheds.

They have a good life.

Tom







The Suffolk originated in England from Southdown x Norfolk crosses and was imported into the United States in 1888. The Suffolk is the largest-sized breed in the United States, and is widely used as a terminal sire in market lamb production. The Suffolk has a black head and legs which are free of wool, excellent growth rate, and the ewes are prolific and good milkers. Suffolks produce superior, high-cutability carcasses, but medium-wool fleeces are frequently contaminated with black fibers. Longevity is less than in many other breeds, especially in harsh environments. Suffolk x fine-wool cross ewes ("terminal cross" ewe lambs) are frequently kept as ewes for market lamb production. They are large, prolific, and good milkers, but have a shorter breeding season and lighter and lower-quality fleeces than their fine-wool mothers.



The Shropshire originated in England from native stock and Southdown, Leicester, and Cotswold crosses and was imported into the United States in 1855. Shropshires are medium to large with a dark face, prolific, good milkers, and produce good carcasses. They are located in farm flocks and are used as a terminal sire breed in market lamb production. They produce medium wool.



The Katahdin hair sheep breed originated in Maine from crosses of imported Caribbean hair sheep and a variety of woolled breeds. The Katahdin has been selected for a shedding hair coat which does not require shearing, low-maintenance lambing, multiple births, and improved muscling. The hair coat can be any color or color pattern. Katahdins are medium-sized and exhibit out-of-season breeding ability, as well as parasite tolerance. The breeds used in developing Katahdins have conferred adaptability to a wide range of climatic conditions; their hair-sheep ancestry makes them better adapted to hot, humid climates than most U.S. breeds.



This breed originated in Iceland and is hardy and adapted to harsh, changeable climate and marginal pasture and browse conditions. Ewes are prolific, good milkers, and possess exceptional longevity. The Icelandic has historically been a meat breed but is also a noted source of wool for lopi yarn. Fleece colors can be white, tan, brown, gray, or black. The breed is both polled and horned with both sexes capable of horn growth.



The Hampshire originated in England from Southdown x Wiltshire Horn and Berkshire Knot crosses and was imported into the United States in the 1800s. The Hampshire is a large breed, quite similar to the Suffolk, and the chief competitor to the Suffolk as a terminal sire in market lamb production. Hampshires have black faces and wool on the legs, have good growth and carcass cutability, and produce medium-wool fleeces.



The Corriedale breed originated in New Zealand from Lincoln and Leicester x Merino crosses and was imported into the United States in 1914. Corriedales are medium-sized, white-faced with wool on the legs, and generally located in the farm-flock states. They are moderately prolific and yield heavy, medium-wool fleeces with good, staple length.



Columbia, the first breed of U.S. origin, was developed beginning in 1912 from Lincoln x Rambouillet crosses. Columbias are relatively hardy and gregarious. They are one of the larger-sized breeds in the United States, and have white faces and wool on the legs. They yield heavy, medium-wool fleeces with good staple length. They are used as a dam breed in range flocks, as a general-purpose, farmflock breed, and also to sire crossbred market lambs.



The Southdown originated in England, is one of the oldest sheep breeds, and was imported into the United States in 1803. For several years, there has been selection for increased body size in the Southdown breed in North America. Some breeders preferred the smaller animals of previous years and formed the North American Babydoll Southdown Sheep Association and Registry in 2001 to promote and maintain pedigree records on this smaller-framed Southdown.





**The Hampshire Sheep is dual-purposed. They produce fine quality wool and excellent meat. They are most famous for those who want dual-purpose sheep, as they do both jobs exceptionally well. Like the Suffolk sheep, they also have black legs and faces, which makes them decently distinguishable.**

**These sheep grow fast, allowing them to produce high-quality meat rather quickly. They are active foragers and are very calm sheep. These traits make them reasonably easy to take care of.**

**Like most breeds we've read about thus far, this breed initially in the 1800s. It was bred by crossing Southdowns to the Hampshire Downs of the U.K. It became popular in the United States shortly after it was bred.**



The **Dorset sheep** are bred for meat. It has medium-length wool and is most well-known for its prolific lambing. Most Dorset sheep in the United States are the Polled Dorset, which is a particular type. They are prolific breeders and milkers, which they are sometimes used for exclusively. However, they are mostly prized for their high-quality meat production.

This breed originated in Salem, Oregon, in 1860. However, polled Dorset originated in Raleigh, North Carolina.

This breed is second to only the Suffolk breed in the United States in terms of popularity. They are the most popular white-faced breed in the United States as well. If you see a white-faced sheep, it is probably a Dorset.

The most popular meat breeds in the U.S. are **Cheviot, Dorset, Hampshire, Shropshire, Southdown, and Suffolk**

The six breeds with the most purebred registrations are **Katahdin, Hampshire, Suffolk, Dorper, Dorset, and Southdown.**