

Ryleland Sheep

Last Updated Wednesday, 16 January 2008

Description

The Ryeland is one of the oldest of British breeds going back seven centuries when the monks of Leominster in Herefordshire bred sheep and grazed them on the rye pastures, giving them their name. They were considered to have the finest wool of all British breeds of the time. Queen Elizabeth the First was given 'Lemster' wool stockings and liked them so much that from then on she insisted only on 'Lemster' Ryeland wool.

Wool

The wool from Ryeland Sheep is white and and free of kemp and contamination of clips is not a problem. A coloured gene does occur in UK but we prefer to breed our flock with white wool. The hoofs are black and they are said to have good resistance to footrot. The sheep are naturally hornless.

Alf Pink with his Grandson Matt

with Three Award Winning Pedigree Sheep

Breeding

The breeding of Ryeland Sheep has changed over the years and while some may say it is progress to alter breed type, we believe in the conservation of old breeds of livestock. Once they are gone, they are gone for ever and I believe that conservation is of breed type and characteristics and not just a breed name.

Characteristics

Ryeland Sheep are one of the traditional British sheep breeds. They're well known for producing excellent quality lamb and great tasting meat. Ryeland lamb is much sought after by rare-breed butchers, top chefs, hotels and restaurants. Hand spinners and weavers also seek out Ryeland sheep's wool for its texture and quality.

Unlike some breeds of sheep Ryelands are docile and easy to look after, which makes them ideal for smallholders or people new to farming sheep. Ryeland sheep do well on a diet of good grass, without the need for additional feed. This means they are particularly suitable for organic lamb production.

Ryeland pedigree sheep must be white throughout

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Head

Medium length, masculine in rams, head with no trace of horn and face showing character, strength and constitution

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Face

Medium length, dull white in colour, relatively free of wool, dark skins around nose, nostrils not contracted. White hair on dark skin around eye. Eye bright and clear of wool.

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Ears

Medium size carried slightly back (not heavy nor hanging down), dark colour - either brown shade with white hair (sometimes spotted with black) or covered with short white wool.

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Neck

Strong, broad, and set on so as to give the head a bridled appearance

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Shoulders

Smoothly and well set, no depression behind

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Chest

Broad and fairly deep

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Back

Straight, level from base of neck to setting of tail, which should be broad

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Ribs

Well sprung, body well down forming a good body line

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Legs of Mutton

Full, well let down. Good length of hindquarter from hipbone to dock.

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Legs and Feet

Dull white colour, single black spot not objected to as it is invariably a birthmark and not hereditary. Legs below knee and hocks all straight, compact feet firmly set.

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Skin

Healthy pink colour except where otherwise stated.

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Flesh

Even and firm handling all over

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Carriage

Smart appearance when walking or standing. Head held high.

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Fleece

To be good in quality, stronger in rams than in ewes, deep in staple, thickly set on skin, handling firmly, close level appearance, every part including belly and purse well covered, except where otherwise stated. Free from coarseness, kemp black, grey or rusty fibres.

[Source: www.ryelandfbs.com - Opens in a new browser window]

AccreditationS

Both of our flocks are MV accredited and licensed - please click the SAC logo (below) for more information about this important aspect of sheep breeding.

Additionally, both flocks are highly resistant to scrapie, are monitored for this condition and are registered as part of the National Scrapie Plan, which involves regular blood tests to ensure the flocks are free of this condition. Please click on the DEFRA logo below for more information.

Useful Links

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