

Sheep and Wool

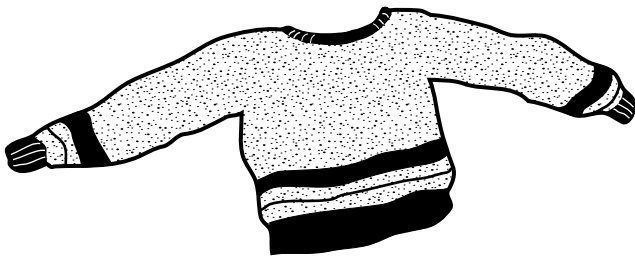
Sheep were some of the first animals to be domesticated by ancient people. They have been providing meat and clothing to people for over 10,000 years.

Sheep are very gentle animals and are easily frightened. They flock together for protection because they can't really protect themselves. Sheep have many natural predators, animals that hunt and kill sheep for food. They include coyotes, wolves and domestic dogs. Sometimes larger animals, like mules or llamas, are kept in the pastures with the sheep to scare off possible predators.

The people who raise and care for sheep are called shepherds. Sometimes, shepherds have dogs to help take care of the sheep. The dog learns to round up the sheep, and when one wanders from the flock, the dog brings it back.

There are many different breeds of sheep. Some are raised for meat, and others primarily for their wool. Sheep are valuable because they often graze land that other livestock cannot. Sheep eat grass and hay. Oklahoma is a good place for raising sheep because it is one of only a few states that has year-round forage production.

Spinning wool into thread began about 5,000 years ago. Wool is a special natural fiber. It always feels warm and soft. It is very good at keeping out the cold and at warming your skin. Even if your wool sweater gets wet from snow or rain, it will still keep you warm. Wool also wears well and lasts for a long time. One of the best things about wool fabric is that it is flame resistant, so it is safer to wear than some other fabrics.



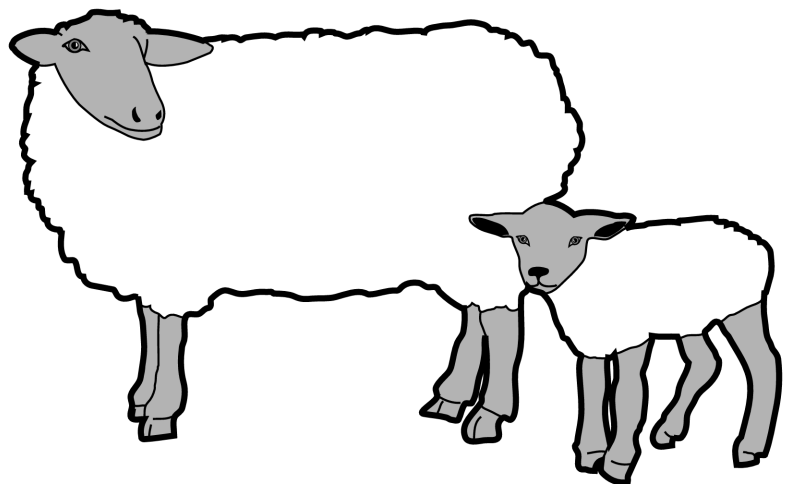
One sheep produces eight to ten pounds of wool per year, enough to make a man's suit. One pound of wool can make ten miles of yarn.

Wool straight from the sheep is called raw wool. Raw wool may go through more than 70 processing steps to assure that fabrics made from the wool are of the highest quality.

Oklahoma's sheep and lamb inventory on January 1, 2016, was 746,000 head. Wool produced from Oklahoma sheep in 2016 was 95,000 pounds.

Wool can have a wide range of natural colors and textures, depending on which animal produced the fleece. To help consumers and spinners identify pure wool, the wool industry designed a trademark symbol. The wool symbol can only be used on products made from pure new wool. The wool symbol is used and recognized all over the world.

Wool can also be made from the hair or fur of goats, rabbits, llamas and even a semi-wild animal from the Andes mountains called a vicuna.



Vocabulary

bale—a large bundle of goods tightly tied for storing or shipping

breed—a group of animals or plants usually found only under human care and different from related kinds

by-product—a product or result produced in addition to the main product or result

ewe—a female of the sheep or a related animal especially when mature

fleece—the woolly coat of an animal

flock—a group of animals (as birds or sheep) assembled or herded together

gland—a cell or group of cells that makes and secretes a product (as saliva, sweat, bile, or shell) for further use in or for elimination from the plant or animal body

lamb—a young sheep especially less than one year old or without permanent teeth

lanolin—the fatty coating of sheep's wool especially when purified for use in ointments and cosmetics

ram—a male sheep

shear—to cut the hair or wool from

wool—the soft wavy or curly usually thick undercoat of various mammals and especially the sheep

yarn—a natural or manufactured fiber (as cotton, wool, or rayon) formed as a continuous strand for use in knitting or weaving

common—relating or belonging to or used by everyone

flock—a group of animals assembled or herded together

grazing—feeding on growing grass or herbs

Industrial Revolution—a rapid major change in an economy marked by the general introduction of power-driven machinery

medieval—of, relating to, or characteristic of the Middle Ages, the period of European history from about AD 500 to about 1500

overgrazing—allowing animals to graze (as a pasture) to the point of damaging the vegetation

pasture—land or a plot of land used for grazing

shearing—cutting the hair or wool from

shepherd—a person who takes care of sheep