

# Finnsheep: Big New Upturns



Finnsheep's lack of horns and tails that don't need docking are traits that offer shepherds wide product variety with a little more safety and easier health management.

*The Finnsheep breed was originally imported into the United States to increase lambing percentages in commercial flocks. Since its original importation and development, the Finnsheep has broadened its usage base and is currently developing into one of the most versatile sheep breeds available today. International Finnsheep Registry President, Heidi Trimbur, recently travelled to Finland for a first hand look at today's Finnsheep as they have been developed by the Finnish people. The following is her account of the breed as it exists in Finland and as it is developing in the United States.—Editor.*

BY HEIDI TRIMBUR, PRESIDENT  
INTERNATIONAL FINNSHEEP REGISTRY

One of the first things that struck me specifically about the breed in Finland is its sheer size and overall mass of body. The Finnish people have done a tremendous job in increasing the carcass yield and it shows. Their Finnsheep have superb bone, strong topline and well-balanced conformation which allows them to handle the extra muscle and physical size of the carcass.

The breed is not overly tall, so there is no waste in leg or neck length. Toplines show no downward slant towards the hindquarter and no dip behind the shoulder.

There is superb width in the chest and the hindquarters are well muscled, correctly conformed and balanced: Very nice and very efficient.

Their outstanding bodies are further complimented with a very docile temperament and, while some of the farms are still

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working on this, the better sheep also have superb wool.

The wool is medium-fine, extremely soft, has very distinct staple definition and well-defined crimp. Its very high luster is what makes it very unique for its wool class. Quality Finnsheep wool shines in such a way that is usually only seen in the coarser longwools.

Finnsheep are highly productive, and those that possess excellent production abilities along with the above mentioned attributes are quite valuable.



Finnsheep wool is medium-fine, very soft and lustrous. It should possess excellent crimp and staple definition. This photo shows some excellent raw Finnsheep wool. (Photo courtesy of Pirtti Kehraamo Oy Woolen Mill outside of Mikkeli, Finland, specializing in processing domestically produced Finnsheep wool.)

Finland has a class ranking system for its sheep and part of the ranking system is based on production numbers. The ideal Finnsheep ewe for example, will produce twins at her yearling lambing and triplets thereafter. Ewes remain in production for eight to ten years. These statistics are kept on record in Finland (the International Finnsheep Registry is developing a similar program) so ram and ewe buyers can identify the genetics most suited to the improvement of their own flocks.

Great attention is paid to loin area measurement and total pounds of lamb weaned per ewe. Three nicely grown lambs are much more desired than five poorly grown ones. For this reason, overproduction in the ewe is not desired.

Ewes give birth year round in Finland, they can do so in the United States as well. Their ability to breed out of season is a definite plus if the producer requires a year round supply of lamb.

## Feeding The Market Every Day

Lamb and mutton are definitely consumed year round in Finland and the country does a fantastic job of producing, marketing and selling its Finnsheep meat products at all price points. There are the prime cuts of lamb that most of us are familiar with here in the U.S., but there are also the less expensive products that anyone can afford for the weekday dinner table. Lunchmeats, sausages and seasoned canned ground lamb and mutton products are available everywhere. This is an area of product production that could definitely be improved in the United States.



The main Finnsheep colors are brown, white and black. These are main colors in Finland with special attention paid to richness and intensity. Other colors include grays and lighter browns. Finnsheep in Finland spend summers on pasture but many spend winters in "sheep houses" due to their homeland's climate.

We've all seen lamb products in the local grocery store that are just too costly for many grocery budgets today. Like most meats, Finnsheep meat taste can be influenced by what the animal was fed prior to processing. Finnsheep are raised very naturally in Finland, thriving on grasses and forest vegetation. When raised this way, the Omega-3 content of the meat is much

higher than grain fed meats. The meat is also very lean and "milk" tasting.

Finnsheep in Finland are quite hardy and do very well in grass-fed programs. Many Finnsheep producers in the United



Finnish culture is efficient! Sauna is a way of life for the Finnish and saunas are absolutely everywhere! Here, sauna meets efficiency in yarn production! Finnsheep Breeders Association of Finland President, Anu Pentti uses her family sauna to dye her Finnsheep wool during the colder months. She has just removed newly dyed wools from the final rinse. They will dry in the sauna and then be finished in the outer "shower" room.



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States have also cultivated genetic lines that do very well in this type of program.

## Finnish Comfort & Style

Another aspect of the Finnsheep's versatility is its wool production. Again, Finland does a fabulous job of making wool available in the marketplace at all price points.

Wool is a renewable resource and the Finnish people are very environmentally aware. Wool is used in areas and in ways that significantly reduce the Finnish environmental footprint. Wool products are everywhere:

High fashion clothing, slippers, insulation, curtains, furniture, blankets, shoes, cars, decorations, baby toys—you name it—you can find it in wool in Finland!



Lovely Finnsheep sheepskins are creatively used for all types of items in Finland. Sheepskin scarves are very popular as are Finnsheep trimmed wool slippers, coats and vests.



Woolen "Bottlecats" and "Bottledogs" keep chilled drinks cold and clear of sweaty condensation.

Finnsheep wool felts superbly and its lustrous softness makes it a fine choice for sweaters, hats and mittens. Sheepskins are widely used in Finland and there is much potential for this type of market in the United States. Skins are used in all types of products, from scarves, clothing trimmings, blankets and wall hangings to baby covers and car seats: The uses are endless!

## Take-Home Lessons

While my purpose in traveling to Finland was to speak at a sheep conference in Tampere, I was also there to learn from the Finnish people what the true traits and characteristics of their national sheep breed are and what is in store for future development of the Finnsheep breed.

The International Finnsheep Registry Breed Standard was developed in North America with input from Finland. Breed standards are an important guide for growers who don't have the opportunity to observe firsthand what a breed's purpose and role are.

The Finnsheep is a *versatility* breed. It's more than a mere enhancer of production volume. In order to live up to the standard, Finnsheep must possess an outstanding carcass, be hardy, provide superb wool, early maturity, high fertility and multiple lambs per birth. While all these aspects make breeding a quality Finnsheep a bit more challenging than breeds that focus on a single specific product, the Finn is uniquely positioned to provide producers with a wider variety of products to take to the marketplace (or just to enjoy on the farm).



Practically every Finnish home contains wool, whether insulation, wool garments, shoes, clocks... even happy holiday wreaths that don't shed pine needles!

To learn more, call the International Finnsheep Registry at: 717-586-2117, visit their website [InternationalFinnsheepRegistry.org](http://InternationalFinnsheepRegistry.org); write: International Finnsheep Registry, 3937 Ridgewood Road, York, PA 17406; e-mail: [internationalfinnsheepregistry@gmail.com](mailto:internationalfinnsheepregistry@gmail.com) or e-mail the author: [trimburfield@gmail.com](mailto:trimburfield@gmail.com). See IFR's ad (next page). ♪



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*For a complete list of breeders and more information about Finnsheep, visit the IFR Website: [www.Internationalfinnsheepregistry.org](http://www.Internationalfinnsheepregistry.org)*



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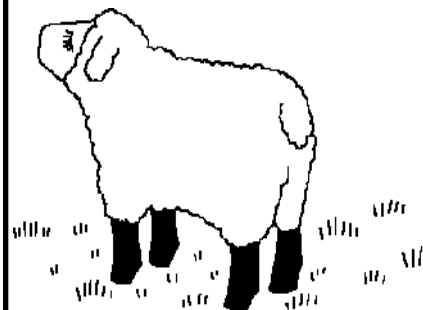
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