



# FOCUS

## Finnsheep

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Finnsheep Registry

The Finnsheep is a medium-sized, multi-purpose, medium-fine wool breed developed over the past several centuries. DNA evidence shows that the breed was developed by crossing native Finnish sheep with those that entered Northern Europe via established trade routes along the Atlantic coast and the Danube and Volga River Systems. Designed to survive in the rugged climate of Finland, the Finnsheep is a hardy breed with exceptional foraging abilities.

The Finnsheep is a quiet, docile breed and its outstanding temperament makes it a popular choice for small farms and families with children. The breed is polled and its naturally short tail does not require docking, adding another element of ease to its care and handling. Well-conformed Finnsheep possess a strong, level topline with no dip behind the shoulder. Their faces should be bright and alert, well-set on to their neck, which blends nicely into an open chest and rib cage of good width and depth. Shoulders should be open and of sufficient size as to balance the conformation of the hindquarter yet not so large as to cause lambing difficulties. While in the past the Finnsheep has had a shorter length and loin area, today's Finnsheep should possess increased length, size and muscling in these areas. Hindquarters of the Finnsheep should be broad and strong with sufficient width to the hip and pelvic areas. Body muscling should be suitable for type with bone size being complementary to type. All legs should be correct and well-set on, pasterns strong and hooves strong and disease free. Rams traditionally weigh around

200 pounds although this has increased substantially as Finnish researchers work to increase muscling and loin size of the breed and a 250-280 pound Finnsheep ram is not uncommon. Ewes will average about fifty pounds less than the rams.



This is a photo of a Type A Dilute Ruskea Finnsheep ram lamb. Generally classified as “Fawn” or “Dilute Brown” in the US, the International Finnsheep Registry uses an adaptation of the official Finnish terminology to help breeders better clarify the genetics behind the color. The foreground is a Ruskea (brown) lamb and in the back is a Type A Musta (dilute black, quickly becoming ice grey) lamb.

*Trimburfield Finnsheep photo.*



*Finnsheep ewes out on pasture. Trimburfield Finnsheep photo.*

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Known worldwide for their outstanding reproductive traits, the Finnsheep has been used in the development of over twenty different breeds and it is still used in the development of cross-bred, commercial flocks that need to improve reproductive abilities without sacrificing wool quality. Finnsheep rams are extremely fertile at a young age (four to six months) and Finnsheep ewe lambs can be bred in the fall of their first year if of appropriate size and weight. Yearling Finnsheep ewes average 1.9 lambs per litter with mature ewes averaging 2.7 lambs per litter. Finnsheep ewes cycle out of season, making them a desirable option for year-round lamb production programs. They also possess outstanding maternal instincts, making lambing time much less stressful for the shepherd. Due to the longevity and fertility of the breed, they are an economically sound investment as yearly replacement percentages are fairly low. This means the shepherd can save investment dollars when replenishing the breeding flock.

A very unique characteristic of the Finnsheep is its wool. Of medium-fine class, it is very different from other prolific short-tailed breeds. The wool is lustrous, silky-soft and possesses a higher number of crimps per inch than other Northern European breeds. Finnsheep wool is available in a wide variety of natural colors and patterns. Base colors include Musta (black) and Ruskea (brown) and these are the colors from which an almost unlimited number of shades of dilute or agouti-based grey and fawn (respectively) are produced. Patterns found in Finnsheep include: Valkoinen (white), Kirjava (multi-colored/spotted), Hopea (silver) and Mayrat (Badger-faced).

Finnsheep wool is a favorite among hand spinners and crafters and is one of the most highly sought after wools for felting. There are several felted works of art, currently on display in European museums that are made exclusively of Finnsheep wool. The unique versatility of Finnsheep wool provides the producer with a wider range of marketing options for their wool clip than those found with other breeds. In addition, the medium-fine wool also allows the cross-bred producer to make production improvements in the flock without the loss of wool quality. In many cases, the use of Finnsheep genetics will not only improve production numbers but also improve wool qualities of the cross-bred flock, farther expanding marketing opportunities and profits.



**These black and grey ram lambs shows the fleece and color associated with Finnsheep.** *Trimburfield Finnsheep photo.*

Today's Finnsheep is also much more disease resistant and Finnsheep with genetic resistance to scrapie can now be purchased for commercial, cross-breeding flocks as well as for the small farm. This is a valuable addition to the breed, farther enhancing its appeal and marketability.

While the use of the Finnsheep over the past decades has been primarily centered around its production abilities, it was originally developed, and continues to be used, as a versatile sheep for small farms. With today's growth in the sheep production industry being primarily centered on the growth of small farms, the Finnsheep is a perfect fit for most of these production systems.

To learn more about the Finnsheep breed, its capabilities and markets, contact the International Finnsheep Registry, 3937 Ridgewood Rd., York, PA 17406. 717-683-8607 or online at: [www.internationalfinnsheepregistry.org](http://www.internationalfinnsheepregistry.org). ■



**A Finnsheep ewe and her lambs, demonstrating production with color.** *Trimburfield Finnsheep photo.*