



The History of Targhee Sheep

The western range industry has long demanded a breed of sheep, thick in natural fleshing, producing high quality apparel type wool, and adapted to rugged conditions. Such a breed would contribute to breeding stability and simplify marketing problems with uniform body type and fleece grade. Many sheep breeders thought the ideal range breed would be $\frac{3}{4}$ fine wool and $\frac{1}{4}$ long wool breeding. This was commonly called a “come back” sheep.

To fulfill this need the Targhee sheep was developed by the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station at Dubois, Idaho. In 1926 a group of 210 of the experiment station’s cross-bred ewes, consisting of Rambouillet, Lincoln, and Corriedale blood, were bred to nine of the smoothest, thickest experiment station Rambouillet rams. After three years of the program, 201 first generation ewes were carefully selected and bred intensely. These ewes weighed 91 pounds as yearlings after shearing. A wide range of variations were produced in the second and third generations, but careful selection reduced the variations in future generations.

The new breed of sheep was named Targhee after the Targhee National Forest where the sheep grazed during the summer.

The first private individual to breed Targhees was Henry J. Yoppe of Eureka, Montana. He began breeding $\frac{3}{4}$ crosses in 1929, and in 1934 bought his first Targhee ram from Dubois.

In 1942 Montana State University began a Targhee breeding program and over the next ten years a number of individuals began Targhee breeding programs. This was usually accomplished by sorting a band of Rambouillet, Columbia, or Rambouillet-Columbia ewes that met the selection criteria for “Targhee Type” as established by the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station. In large bands this usually resulted in 10% or fewer being kept. Sieben Live Stock Company of Helena, Montana, sorted 12,000 Rambouillet ewes to come up with 800 that met the criteria. These ewes were then crossed with Targhee rams from Dubois. When the Targhee Association was formed it was determined that five generations of top crossing were required to register the sheep.

On September 27, 1951 a group of top sheepmen met with the staff of the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station at Dubois and formed the U.S. Targhee Sheep Association. The first officers were: President, G. Curtis Hughes - Stanford, Montana; Vice President, Henry S. Hibbard – Helena, Montana; Directors, Henry J. Yoppe – then of Livingston, Montana; and Leo Pfister – Whitney, Nebraska. At a later meeting Steve Thompson – Heppner, Oregon was elected a Director and Bill Boylan – Bozeman, Montana was appointed Secretary/Treasurer.

In 1966, the books of the association were closed and since that time registered Targhees must be from registered parents.

The states with large numbers of Targhees are Montana, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming, but there are members in a total of 20 states as well as Canada.

Written by Jack McRae