Let's Learn About Sheep

Sheep are used for meat, wool, milk and grazing. They are the oldest tamed animal in the world. Sheep are found all over the world. There are 6.2 million sheep and more than 69,000 sheep farms/ranches in the United States. The states that have the most sheep are Texas, California, Wyoming, Colorado, Montana, South Dakota, Idaho, Utah, Iowa and Oregon. East of the Mississippi River, Ohio has the most sheep.

Different Sheep Breeds

Although there are more than 1,000 breeds of sheep in the world, there are more than 40 different breeds in the United States. Sheep come in all different sizes, shapes and colors.

Sheep Breed Exercise: Match the following sheep breeds to the picture descriptions below.

Suffolk    Columbia    Dorset    Rambouillet

1. Most common breed of sheep in the United States, especially in the western states where the majority of sheep in this country are raised. These sheep produce a high-quality, fine-wool fleece.

2. This breed is the largest in the United States. They have an all-black head and legs that are free from wool.

3. These sheep are popular in the farm-flock states. They are medium sized, have white faces, produce medium wool fleeces free of black fibers and have wool down their legs.

4. In 1912, this breed was developed in the United States making it the first one created in this country. They have white faces with wool extending down their legs.

Lambs

Most lambs are born in the spring. Mother ewes usually give birth to one, two or three lambs. Some mother ewes can have as many as five lambs at once! Lambs can stand soon after they are born. The mother ewe cleans them off. Lambs drink their mother’s milk and grow strong. Soon, lambs will eat grasses and grain like their mother. Lambs will be almost fully grown at six months old and will weigh between 110 and 120 pounds! Lambs stay with their mother until they are five months old. Like kids, lambs spend their day eating, sleeping and playing. They love to run and jump.

Answers for the activities in the Sheep Reporter, along with more information about the U.S. sheep industry, can be found at www.sheepusa.org in the kids section. Check it out!
Wool is the natural fiber grown from sheep. Different breeds of sheep grow different kinds of wool. Sheep can grow fine wool, medium wool or coarse wool.

Fine wool is often used to make suits, medium wool is often used to make blankets and coarse wool is often used to make carpets.

Did You Know?
One pound of wool can be spun into 20 miles of yarn.
One sheep produces anywhere from 2 to 30 pounds of wool per year.
Wool is flame resistant, which means it will not catch fire.
Wool can be bent 20,000 times without breaking.

Make Your Own Wool Sheep
Many sheep are covered with wool. You can make your own sheep using cotton balls for its wool. You will need: glue, black paper, a hole punch, scissors, string and cotton balls.
1. Cut out shape at right and trace onto black paper, and cut out.
2. Punch hole at top; thread string through and tie ends together.
3. Glue cotton balls to both sides, leaving the face and leg areas blank.

Sheep get a haircut once a year. This is called shearing. Shearing does not hurt the sheep. Sheep have their wool removed in one piece called a fleece, which is cut off with electric shears. Spring is usually shearing time for sheep so that they are cooler in the warm summer months.

How Wool Becomes Fabric

1. Shearing

2. Sorting

Because wool is a natural fiber, hay, twigs, dirt and thorns must be picked out of the wool.

3. Scouring

The fleece is washed in big tubs to remove dirt, grease and grass. It is then laid out to dry.

4. Carding

The clean dry wool is then carded. Carding means to comb the wool to straighten the fibers.

5. Dyeing

The fleece is colored in a tub of dye.

6. Spinning

The wool is spun into yarn. Coarser wool is spun into woolen yarn. Finer wool is spun into worsted yarn. Woolen yarn is usually used in carpets or thick sweaters. Worsted yarn is usually used to make lightweight fabrics for suits and dresses.

7. Knitting/Weaving

The yarn is knit or woven into fabric.
Sheep Give Us Meat and Milk

Lamb meat is full of good vitamins and minerals to help people stay strong and healthy. Lamb meat is a good source of protein, vitamin B-12, niacin, zinc and iron. One serving of lamb meat provides half the iron most people need in a day.

Sheep were raised for their milk before cows were. There are approximately 100 sheep dairy farms in the United States concentrated in Wisconsin and the northeast part of the country. Sheep milk can be frozen and stored. More cheese can be made from a gallon of sheep milk than from cow or goat milk. Most of the sheep milk produced in the world is made into cheese. It is also made into yogurt and ice cream. The most common and productive sheep milk breed is the East Friesian.

Did You Know?
The fleece from one sheep is enough to make one man’s suit.
The yarn from one fleece can make 46 baseballs.
A female sheep is called a ewe and a male sheep is called a ram.

Sheep Products

Sheep products are used in places most people would not think to look. In fact, most people could not get through the day without sheep and other animal products. Not only do sheep give us meat and milk, but its products are used to make other consumer items.

Some products of sheep are luggage, sports equipment, footwear, make-up, shaving cream, marshmallows, wallpaper, combs and toothbrushes. Other popular products of sheep can be found in the Word Search.

Sheep Products Word Search

Popular products of sheep are listed below. See if you can find them hidden in the block of letters.

Q B Z X C H I N A S D B V L O
W U L C R D F B N A F N C K I
E T K V A P I A N O K E Y S U
R T J B Y S G V M P G M X J Y
D O G F O O D R U M H E A D S
I N H E N A H C Q O H Q C H T
N S G R S T E N N I S B A L L
S T F T N G U M W H T H W R E R
U Y D I M P J E E I A E P G S
L U F L Q O K D R R M R E O U
A I A I W I L I T E P P T F T
T O B Z E D I C E S O A P L U
I P R E R U Z I Y I O I Z A R
O A I R T Y X N Y A R N L M E
N S C A N D L E S U J T K B S

BUTTONS DICE INSULATION SOAP
CANDLES DOG FOOD LEG OF LAMB SUTURES
CARPET DRUM HEADS MEDICINE TENNIS BALL
CHINA FABRIC PAINT TIRES
CRAYONS FERTILIZER PIANO KEYS YARN
GUM SHAMPOO

Lamb-Salsa Calzone

1/2 pound ground American lamb
1/3 cup finely chopped green pepper
1 package (10 ounces) refrigerated pizza crust
3/4 cup shredded part-skim Mozzarella or pizza cheese

18 teaspoon pepper
1/4 teaspoon onion powder
1 tablespoon water
3/4 cup chunky salsa
2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese

In skillet sprayed with nonstick cooking spray, cook and crumble lamb until brown. Drain well. Stir in salsa, green pepper, onion powder and pepper. On lightly greased baking sheet, roll or pat pizza dough to a 12x18-inch rectangle. Spoon meat mixture on one-half of the dough and sprinkle with Mozzarella cheese (leaving 1 inch of dough exposed on edges). Fold dough crosswise over meat mixture. Press edges together to seal. Make 2 or 3 slashes in top to let steam escape. Beat together egg and water. Brush on dough and sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. Bake in 425 degrees F oven for 10 to 15 minutes or until golden brown. Remove from oven; let stand 5 minutes. Cut into 4 portions.
Sheep are Good for the World Around Us

Sheep Flock Maze
Help the sheep flock find its way to pasture to graze.

Did You Know?
Sheep graze for an average of seven hours per day.
Sheep make good pets because they are a gentle animal and respond well to human contact.
The age of sheep can be determined by its teeth.

Sheep like to graze. Grazing means the sheep eat growing grasses, weeds and bushes. Sheep graze where crops, such as corn and wheat, cannot grow. Grazing is good for the environment. Properly grazed lands help reduce carbon dioxide and greenhouse gases in the air.

Sheep help with weed control. They eat weeds that are harmful to the environment which helps the natural grasses and weeds to grow.

Grazing sheep are good for wildlife like deer and elk. That is because the sheep help the plants that deer and elk like to eat grow. They do this simply by walking on the ground. Their hooves help loosen the very top layer of soil, which allows more water and air to go down into the dirt. The water and air help plants grow.

Grazing sheep in forests is good for young trees. Sheep graze weeds and bushes that would take sunlight and water away from the baby trees if the weeds and bushes were allowed to grow too tall.

Sheep are good firefighters because they eat lots of bushes, grasses and weeds that could spread a forest fire.

Mutton Bustin’
Mutton bustin’ is like bull riding for little kids that takes place at rodeos around the country. Children from the ages of four to seven ride a sheep bareback. The goal is to ride the sheep for six seconds. The riders hold on to the sheep’s wool and wear helmets to protect their heads. Although sheep do not buck as much, it is difficult for riders to stay on the sheep.

Guardians of Sheep
Men and women who care for sheep are called shepherds. Shepherds feed and protect the sheep. Many shepherds have dogs that help them manage and guard the sheep. There are two kinds of sheep dogs: working dogs and guard dogs.

Guard dogs help protect the sheep from other wild animals. Guard dogs are large and taught to bond with the sheep they protect. Donkeys and llamas are also used as guardian animals for sheep.

Working dogs are a shepherd’s best friend. They obey the shepherd to help manage the sheep flock. These dogs are able to move the sheep just about anywhere. They are useful for handling large flocks of sheep.