

Heritage Sheep Breed FIBER PROFILE



Saint Croix

A hair sheep

The Saint Croix shares a number of characteristics and historical roots with the Barbados Blackbelly, another rare hair-sheep breed with ties to Caribbean islands, although the two differ dramatically in appearance. The island of Saint Croix is in the U.S. Virgin Islands and the foundation stock for this breed came into mainland North America from that locale. Where they originated before that remains mysterious. Logic suggests that they derived from north Africa. Twenty-first century genetic studies, however, while they confirm the close relationship to the Barbados Blackbelly, show closer relationships between those two breeds and the wool-growing sheep from the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) than to the hair-sheep breeds of Africa.

The fiber, however, bears essentially no resemblance to those Iberian breeds. The Saint Croix mix of fiber types will vary depending on the season, consisting predominantly of hair in the summer and including a more woolly undercoat in the winter. Spring brings shedding. Rams have a chest ruff of very long hair.



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The hair component in the sample shown here has all the characteristics of kemp: it is short, brittle, has angular contours along its length, and flies out exuberantly when the clean wool is handled. That's escaped Saint Croix kemp in the photo just to the right.

The fiber mix can be carded into loose rolags and, with relatively slow, steady twist insertion and light take-up, spun into a yarn to use for texture in tapestries, for basket-making, or for other inventive purposes.



lock and yarn photos reproduced to the same scale



lower photos © Deborah Robson