

Santa Cruz

Santa Cruz sheep exist only in North America, and lived as a feral population, without human care, on the island for which they were named, off the coast of California, until they were removed toward the end of the 20th century. They may have arrived on the island as early as the 1500s. They were certainly well established by the 1800s.

Theories suggest Rambouillet and possibly Merino foundations. Recent genetic analysis indicates influence from the Spanish churro as well, a heritage the Santa Cruz likely shares with the Gulf Coast and the Navajo-Churro.

These speculations help us interpret Santa Cruz wool, which possesses unique qualities. Spun appropriately—and exactly what that means is open to experimentation—the yarns can display a nearly spandex-like elasticity. Another breed where this has occasionally been observed is the Gulf Coast. (The Navajo-Churro, with partially similar ancestors, has entirely



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different qualities.) Sometimes woolen preparation and spinning techniques evoke the fiber's unusual elasticity, whereas occasionally the counterintuitive worsted processes yield those results.

Because of their meager population numbers, finding optimal Santa Cruz wool to work with can be a challenge. Husbandry efforts have, for the most part, emphasized the breed's survival rather than production of the highest-quality fleece.

Despite a lack of data on fleeces, Santa Cruz wool can fairly certainly be categorized as soft enough to be used in next-to-skin textiles. Staple length is not one of the breed's outstanding qualities, although a good 3 inches (7.5 cm) should be attainable. That would make it a reliable fiber for comfortable hand processing. Acquiring sufficient quantities for mill handling is a future goal.

Fleece weight	Insufficient data; small animals, so fleece weight will be relatively light.
Staple length	Guessing 2–4 inches (5–10 cm), although what I've seen lately has been definitely on the short side.
Fiber diameters	Insufficient data; fine; on pure speculation, estimated average range 18–26 microns.
Lock characteristics	Samples I've seen have been very finely crimped but disorganized in the staple. Often very dirty tips. This amazing fiber tends to look very unappealing in the fleeces I'm seeing. It's worth playing with.
Natural colors	Mostly white; a few are medium brown, and some are a dark brown that appears nearly black.



lock photos reproduced to the same scale

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