

## Evaluating Gotland Sheep

This is a first attempt to document how Gotland lambs are evaluated in Europe, and offers information and tools that Gotland breeders in North America may find helpful with their flocks. Virtually every characteristic on the evaluation comes from the GSBANA breed standard (which is almost identical to the AGSS breed standard), with additional details and insight from established evaluative criteria used for conformation of sheep and lambs. Some of the detail comes from the Swedish evaluation, specifically for Gotland fiber. We want to be clear that it is up to each individual to decide what traits are most desirable and a focus in their herd.

In addition to understanding the formal evaluation process that is done in Sweden, we would like to add that evaluations can and should be made regularly. While there is the formal evaluation around 110 days in Sweden, I'm sure that European breeders also use a number of herd metrics as valuable selection criteria. These criteria could include how the lamb grows, and track other herd metrics to include parasite resistance, fertility, mothering ability, quality of their lambs, soundness, thrives in each shepherd's unique climate and program, etc.

The evaluation guide can be used to evaluate a sheep at any age, however, if the evaluative tools are used on an adult sheep, expectations should be adjusted with the understanding that an adult fleece is not the same as a lamb fleece. Conformation, curl, color and fiber qualities can shift dramatically due to many factors discussed in the presentations.

Let's be careful not to eliminate good genetics in the process, because we are far from having an abundance of (or any?) perfect sheep in our North American population. The education materials and resources are just a few more tools that we hope breeders find helpful as a starting place.

In the Evaluating Gotland Lambs presentation video from Black Sheep Gathering in 2019, Anette Skoog references selecting ONE characteristic to focus on each year, and the tips she shared in the presentation are really good.

We look forward to learning and sharing more about what traits are quickest/easiest to improve upon, what expectations we might have when making breeding decisions, and what options exist to build on the good work that has already been done for years in North America.