

SUFFOLK

Breed Standard



The Suffolk sheep is a superior producer of lean meat due to rapid early growth, heavy muscling, and efficient conversion of forage and other feedstuffs. Suffolks are striking in breed character and unrivaled in beauty, having jet black, wool-free heads and legs that sharply contrast their clean white fleeces and pink skin. Suffolk genetics are highly-prized by commercial shepherds to improve the weights and carcass quality of their lamb crops, while the Suffolk head is designed to facilitate ease of lambing. All Suffolk sheep should be structurally and reproductively sound. Rams should be robust and masculine, with significant muscling, body volume, and mass as well as ample fertility and libido. Ewes should be feminine yet thickly-muscled, and demonstrate strong capacity for breeding, lambing ease, mothering instinct and milking ability. In both sexes, preference is given to naturally wide-based, deep bodied, easy fleshing animals free of coarseness or over-refinement. As a meat breed, Suffolk breeding rams and ewes should produce fast-growing lambs that yield carcasses with superior composition and conformation, regardless if purebred or commercial crossbreds. While the mature weights of Suffolk sheep may

vary considerably, breed character and general proportionality of body should be similar across the breed. Appropriate frame size and growth curve should be chosen to match the specific commercial production environment and target carcass weight.

The USSA exists to define, register, promote, and improve the Suffolk breed for the entire U.S. sheep industry. The commercial industry is diverse in its geography, production systems, products, and markets. Suffolk sheep are useful in a wide variety of commercial applications, from terminal range rams to farm flock ewes, as part of composite breeds, and as market lambs. Suffolks are also exhibited in various show classes, from fitted and slick sheared breeding sheep to club lambs and wether sires and dams. Nonetheless, the breed standard provides a common identity for all Suffolks and breeders. The breed standard serves as the ideal relative to which Suffolk sheep are to be evaluated and improved, in terms of their own phenotype as well as the genetic potential they offer to the industry.

Phenotypic Considerations

Head

The Suffolk head is free of wool both at the poll and cheeks, is covered in fine black hair and is moderately long in shape. The otherwise wide skull, broad muzzle and deep jaw denote strength and ability to thrive and forage. The mouth is sound with the incisors meeting flush with the dental pad. A particularly defining breed characteristic is the long, bell-shaped ears that hang below perpendicular and tip slightly forward. Discriminate against short, perpendicular, erect or wool-covered ears or any tendency to colors other than black in the head and ear. Be critical of overly refined or coarse headed sheep lacking in breed and/or sex character.

Forequarter

The Suffolk neck is of moderate length, set smoothly into and atop the shoulder. The shoulder is deep and obliquely set into the body, being smooth and free of coarseness. The shoulder and forearm show evidence of superior muscling. The rack opens up into a wide, heavily muscled topline that extends and widens as it blends into the loin. The chest is deep and naturally wide showing evidence of vigor. The breast plate is neatly tucked up into the chest floor. Ribs are open, deep and well sprung denoting capacity. The barrel itself should be long, deep, wide and large. The belly and the body should be covered in white wool that is free of dark fiber. Preference is given to a tight uniform, white fleece of medium wool quality. Discriminate against steep or open shoulders, extremely long or short neck, lack of muscle shape, pinched ribs and shallowness.

Hindquarter

Preference is given to long bodied, strong topped sheep, showing exceptional muscle shape and volume. The Suffolk loin is deep, long and wide. It blends smoothly and strongly into a level top and rump. The body itself should become progressively wider from front to rear. The widest portion of the sheep should be through the center of the stifle when viewed from behind. Natural width should accompany a leg that excels in both depth of twist and volume in both the inner and outer leg. The prominent stifle should be thick, long and deep. The rear flank should be reasonably level with the fore flank. All body parts should blend smoothly and display the characteristics of an animal capable of producing progeny that hang a superior carcass. Discriminate against short, steep, narrow rumps, weak tops, shallow loins, flat muscle, high flanks and lack of overall excellent muscle development.

Feet, Legs and Mobility

The feet and legs should be set wide apart on the corners of the body. They are moderate in length and covered in fine black hair from the knee and hock to the ground with no tendency to wooliness. The hooves are jet black also. Legs should be of adequate bone size, neither overly refined nor coarse; joints are strong and smooth on flat bone. Toes are of equal size, point forward with a deep heel and set upon a short pastern. The stride should be long, fluid and sure. The gait is athletic. The sheep travels wide when viewed from behind. Discriminate against weak or coarse joints, cow hocks, sickle hocks, bowed knees or hocks, post legs, wooly legs, widely splayed toes and any obstruction that impedes fluid movement.

Discriminations

Sheep showing evidence of the following fail to meet the breed standard: lack of muscle development or ability to grow and thrive, dark or black or colored fleece, unmanageable disposition, underdeveloped genitalia, split or asymmetrical testicles, upturned vulva, hernia, over or undershot jaw, prolapse or tendency to prolapse (rectal or vaginal), inverted eyelids, weak udder attachments and teat size or placement that impedes nursing.

NOTE: The USSA allows for an appendix registry and upgrading to purebred status. When animals reach 15/16th status (purebred) these animals must adhere to the breed standard as well. Sheep that appear to be black faced crossbreds do not meet the Suffolk breed standard.

Genetic and Performance Considerations

Visual or phenotypic selection has been used for centuries in animal breeding. It does address issues of structural correctness, breed type, sex character, and breed aesthetics. Today, there are additional tools and resources available to quantify and measure traits. Genetic testing can reduce and eliminate genetic recessives (spider syndrome, dwarfism, and scrapie susceptibility). The technology more accurately evaluates genotype and expands the ability to select breed improving replacements.

Superior performing animals within a flock can be additionally identified through on farm data collection. This can include such things as weighing (60, 90 or 120 day weights) and ultrasound scanning for carcass traits (loin eye size and fat depth). Another potential strategy is the use of estimated breeding values (EBVs). This tool allows for measurable genetic comparison, over time, and across flocks with other performance recorded flocks. Either of these selection methods (as well as others yet to be developed) can be used as additional tools to measure rapid growth, leanness, and superior muscling – all of which reinforce the Suffolk as the preferred terminal sire breed. Further, as the industry moves toward more objective carcass evaluation, there will be premiums paid for market animals that meet more demanding carcass expectations.