Barb Gunness

Amber N. Brooks

Longwood University, amber.brooks@live.longwood.edu

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and I know I need a mom that is gonna lamb and want its babies. And so the ____ babies we’re looking at were because they were triplets and quads, and I don’t want a mom raising more than two. And then there’s, there are a couple that like a couple of the mothers died or something and so we have or there’s refusal, but it’s so rare that they refuse their babies, I mean they just, and they lamb out here in the woods and they’re just hearty that way. So-

Sounds like they have personality.

They’re very personable. I mean I, they just have personality.

Moving- Let’s see, we’ll go this way.

Charlie: Do you want me to shut the door or…?

The screen door would be great. Yeah.

And with sheep you know you can you can live with duck tape and ______. Cattle you gotta have a little more a little more uh substance.

What’re you doing? Come on.

Sheep bah-ing

Come on, come on everyone.

That’s a great picture

Look at the colored one. Yeah, what’re you guys doing?

So this is a typical Icelandic color, this gray pattern. And they’re born wooly like this. I mean the commercial, American commercial breed will be a real fine wool and it’ll be real tight ringlets. These guys are born with ya know-

commotion, laughing

Come here little milk face.

Jesse: So have you learned to really recognize their different calls and cries and what they’re talking about?

Yeah, kind of. There’s some in here that have different voices and there’ll be a ewe and there will be some ewe that have a really bad bah, I should say where it’s like ‘BUUHHHHH.” And I know, and that’s the same way all the time so I know exactly who’s talking to me and um, yeah they definitely have different voices.

laughing

Can I ask how big they get, like as far as poundage and size?
A mature ewe, about 130 pounds. Um, my goal is a good, solid 130 pounds and then they wein 160 pounds of lamb, meaning two 80 pound lambs.

Wow.

So that to me is a good turn around. Um, and so and these guys this I mean this lamb, none of these lambs were over 10 pounds when they were born. These guys-this one was probably only like six pounds, so they’re doing really good on the bucket.

You, number 21, you were the first one. And you, I mean you’re just-

That’s a big lamb.

Emily: That’s so soft, touch that.

See, the wool it’s considered a coarse wool, but they have such a fine undercoat, and I don’t know it’s very versatile. I-I can get the yarn to be quite soft in the way you spin it.

You’re getting heavy. I can’t even hold on to you.

And then one of the things we’re doing is we are trying sprouted grain because we wanna impact our land here more, but I wanna make sure that they have, uh, a good lush feed, and so we’re s- we’re trying it. There’s, the jury’s out- still out on is it really worth it, nutritionally wise because you’re taking a grain and sprouting it, which I don’t wanna feed grain. I prefer grass, so you’re making it into a grass seed and, um, it- but it’s only gotta get so high and then once it goes beyond that I think you’re wasting your energy cause it leaches out all the nutrients that’re in that sprout. So that’s a barley flat, um, we’ve only been at it for about a year so we’re still seeing if it’s worth it. But they’re sprouting grains, uh, in Australia and, um, in California now. There’s a lot of people using sprouted grains on their-on their grass fed dairies just to extend the grazing season, and also because hay is so expensive. And when they are on that they tend to not eat as much hay, or need as much hay. Um, I gotta see the numbers on that yet cause I felt like we had quite a bit of hay even though we were. And you can’t feed sprouts when it’s minus 20 cause it just turns to glass. When you take it out of the 60 degree environment and bring it out to minus 20 it turns to-it just goes (inaudible noise). (laughing) And so you can’t really feed it in the dead of winter, but we’re trying it. We’re just giving it a chance.

talking to lambs

They’re harder to-(talking to lamb)-they’re harder, see they’re gonna be hard to herd because they’re-they don’t know the rules of-get them!

laughing

That’s why I like Border Collies. I’m kind of, I am kind of a predator lover because they, ya know, they have to survive too and so it’s kinda cool to see.

laughing

he’s like not looking at it, looking at it, not looking at it.
talking to animals

Border Collies—when you go this way they’re supposed to go away from you. That’s how—that’s something you can’t-

-train out-

-that is born in there. And you encourage it and it comes right in. And so then once you have that going, then you work on calling those directions. Way, and this is come by. And then once you got that going then you teach them just to flank. And one of my dogs really is a good flanker. She’ll flank these moms and babies, cause they’re kinda hard to gather to you when they’re this young because the moms turn around and try to kill the dog all the time, so-

Jesse: So when you’re moving them, back and forth, you’re—you’re always using dogs to help?

Yeah. When we go down the highway with them from pasture to over in the prey area, we’ll bring— I’ll bring Kudi or Bimbi with me. She’s a good drive and she’ll just flank like this and my husband’s just in the middle of the road and she moves the sides and they—she keeps ‘em going and then often times when we—we proc—we’ll do two things to them in the summer time. We’ll vaccinate and we’ll worm, and we gotta gather them in and we definitely need dogs to get them in where we want ‘em, and load ‘em into trailers and I can — the rams, we have a whole bunch of rams- I can load the rams without, pretty much without, any side panels to the trailer cause the dogs are that good. And the rams are- these sheep are used to going in the trailer too, that’s the other cool thing about ‘em. So that when they’re—when they go, actually go, to the processor they’re just jumping in the trailer “well I’m just going to another pasture,” and so there’s very low stress animal handling going on. So that—that’s another—so they’re used to being hauled. That’s the other thing I like about what we do. And they’re used to moving, and they’re used to us callin ‘em and all that; whereas, maybe in your typical ranch when you handle the livestock they’re really stressed cause they’ve just been out on range, ya know. And you can’t have it be perfect—a perfect world for that, but that’s just what it is. I just like that I can be around ‘em every day. And you see stuff, ya know? When someone’s getting sick you pick up on it. Sheep don’t-

laughing

Kristen: That’s funny.

Oh Kudi. Oh my goodness. You’re being a good girl. Get me out of this, cause this is just, demeaning.
(talking to animals)

This for a Border Collie, to have lambs all around me.

laughing

Littlest.

Littlest.

talking to animals
Emily: What a good dog.

She’s our last pup that we’ve had and she’s just a doll. She’s four years old though, so she’s a little runt. Little runtish. And that’s Opposum, she’s a- we- we also raised her. She’s a Border Collie-Kelpie. She’s pretty good, but she’s more of a driver than a gatherer. And she’s also a chicken killer and all that.

Jesse: You ever use Australian Shepards?

I have not. I have never owned one.

Jesse: I had one for fourteen years and he was great. Same kind of behavior, just ________

Yeah. They have a natural, very natural ability. And they’re-they have a lot of energy that they can go all day too. Um, I’ve seen different kinds of people and there’s people that use Aussies, there’s people that swear by the mixes. The healer-Aussie or a Border Collie-Healer. Ranch wise for cattle, um, I’ve seen them all. I like-i kinda like the Border Collie cause they’re real- I don’t know. I just like ’em. They have a real- I like their eye that they have. Yeah, that’s my dad’s babies.

background noise

Those tails are natural short. That’s the other thing I like about Icelandics. They’re a short tail sheep, uh, from Iceland, but also in Northern parts of Europe there’s other breeds of sheep with short tails. Schetlins have a short tail, um, there’s a couple others that aren’t over here, rare breed. So that’s another primitive trait

Jesse: So when you went to college, you never that you’d be here did you?

Not with sheep. I always was gonna have dogs, but never thought about sheep. I thought maybe something with horses, maybe riding. Um, doing stuff with horses and cows, but not my own sheep business. And I thought I was gonna do grooming forever, but this thing kinda got where it was working out and so I quit the grooming business. My husband’s a registered nurse and he doesn’t do that anymore. (laughs) He was working at Billing’s Clinic in the ICU and getting paid like 40 dollars an hour and now he works for a ranch, and makes half that much per hour and then hardly any hours. I mean, so we- but-

Jesse: But it seems like it turned out to be really good.

So far, yeah. I’d like to see a little more security on what pastures we have cause we’re gonna lose one this summer. They’re gonna sell the place and that’s gonna reduce us down a little, and I’d like to have our property more cross-fenced so I could do more mob. Those two things. And then I would, I would like to maybe hire somebody temporarily to get my yarn out there. Do my- kinda be my yarn broker or something.

Jesse: There ya go, we have some graduates.

laughing
They were saying that the Montana state has some students that do that kinda thing- help do. So I might check into that yet. See what they can offer

Jesse: I think that that’s more and more common where, uh, as a part of a service learning program or a business degree that they will do marketing research and all for free basically because they’re doing it as a project to earn their degrees.

I’m gonna definitely check that out now that- because some things are just sort of self going and that is I have a handle on how to handle the internal parasites and our animals are a little healthier than they’ve been over the years. That really is hard on the lambs and the young mothers, that internal parasite on that-I got allergies today so- um, but, uh, that is kinda- and I have a real-now I really am comfortable with how much-how the grazing’s working. What I can do, how-where I can push it, and how long I need to be there and what we have for pastures and where we’re going with that and-and mineral program. I got all that down, I mean, listen to how I talk. I talk and talk and talk. Well just sit down with another sheep person about sheep mineral and sheep health and we can be on the phone for hours trying to solve the problems, ya know, and it’s great. I love it. Um, so now that that’s all kinda running itself, it’s time to really get this wool product marketed. We-the other thing that I-we did the sheering school. My husband and I did the sheering school, which I-which it’s great cause I shear, but I’m trying to get better and we really-that really helped us. But there was another thing that happened. There’s an amazing way that you-you classify your wool and you put your wool in different bags and it’s got a label and it’s got a grading and there is an international system- Hey-an international system for your wool type, and I want us on this adult fiber to stock pile and have ‘em put in four by four foot bales that fit on a pallet and they’d fit equally in a shipping box and then they could be shipped out-outta here, overseas where like, places like India where they use all kinds of different wool. It doesn’t have to be merino, which is the thing right now. Um, and the American wool people don’t like our fibers too long and they don’t like the hairy fibers that are in it, but there are places around the world that don’t care. So, and any wool is marketable, it could be just worth a penny though. Pennies are better than zero. But they taught me how to sort that better. Get the belly wool into its own bag. I even am taking the back _____ off the sheep cause that’s really long on these guys and it’s coarser. It’s like on a Collie dog, ya know where they have the long, or Aussie, where they have the bloomers back there. Well these guys have that. Take that off and then maybe even really break down the pelt. You lay that shorn thing out there and you have different areas of the wool that are better than others. Well sort that. Run all the white sheep through first, put the colors second. Do all these things. And this is all that I learned at this sheering school. I did not go there to learn about what to do with their wool. I went there to learn to shear, but I came out of it with this stack of information about how to market your wool better in the wool markets. If we were able to just shear and send the wool off to an international buyer and I just had a few sheep that I turned into yarn, that would be-my husband would be so happy.

This wool is quite amazing actually, though. Feel it.

I know. They did.

(comments about feeling the wool)

Like the neck-the neck wool is gonna be cleaner and the sides are gonna be cleaner. Um, um, this gets kinda dirty and weathered in the summer, but