

Newest Mini Cattle Breed: The Belted Lessor Jersey

"It's a highly desirable breed of miniature cattle that's also a good mini milker and could even be a wonderful pet," says Richard Gradwohl, Happy Mountain Miniature Cattle Farm Corp., Covington, Wash., about a new miniature cattle breed called the belted Lessor Jersey.

When full grown Lessor Jerseys will be 38 to 48 in. tall.

Buckie is the son of Jackson, the original belted Lessor Jersey. Jackson is 81.25 percent Lessor Jersey and 18.75 percent Buelingo. Jackson has a full white belt from the Buelingo influence. The Buelingo breed is based on a 50-50 cross between the Angus and Belted Galloway beef breeds. "The wide, white belt from Jackson will come through genetically in 50 percent of the offspring."

Gradwohl is founding director of the International Miniature Cattle Breeders Society and over the last few years has developed several other mini cattle breeds.

"This new breed is not only capable of outstanding feed efficiency but also has high quality milk production. And its docile nature makes it a great pet," he says.

The animals are registered in the International Miniature Cattle Breeders Society.

"We're interested in selling these animals only to people who will work closely with us in further development of these unique animals. Semen and embryos are available," says Gradwohl.

"We want to develop herds of Jackson offspring worldwide. We view this as our way to make a significant contribution to controlling world hunger by developing a world class breed of miniature cattle that is highly feed efficient and also an excellent producer for both beef and high quality milk."

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This calf is part Jersey and part Buelingo and will grow to be 38 to 48 in. tall.

Ancient Sheep Breed Originated In Asia

With a U.S. population of only about 1,500 head, Karakuls are a rare sheep breed with a rich history. Dwight and Lynn McKay of Newmankstown, Penn., first discovered the flavor of Karakul meat but it wasn't until the couple saw some live Karakuls, that they "fell in love with how they look."

"We first met Karakuls as dinner," Lynn explains. "An acquaintance with a non-registered flock was selling frozen meat, and we really liked it. But then we actually saw some Karakuls at a show in Maryland and realized how lovely they are to look at. They come in almost any color under the sun and that really appealed to us. I had always wanted to spin so we thought we'd get some for the fibre."

The couple calls their breeding operation, "Caledonia Karakuls," and they have been active in the show ring, as well as weaving rugs. They've also done extremely well with the shorn fleeces they've entered in shows. They now have a breeding flock of 19 sheep.

The breed is native to central Asia, where it dates back to 1400 B.C. It was named after the village of Karakul in Uzbekistan. Due to the harsh conditions in this region, the sheep developed an ability to thrive under adverse conditions such as limited water supply, scant vegetation and high altitude. This hardiness remains today.

Karakuls are medium sized and have long, straight and very strong wool that would reach the ground if not shorn twice a year. Rams weigh between 175 and 225 lbs., while ewes average between 100 and 150 lbs. They have a higher-than-average lamb survival rate, due to the long, narrow heads and slender shoulders of the lambs that allows for easier births.

The adult sheep have wide, broad tails that store 7 to 9 lbs. of fat as a source of nourishment, similar to the camel's hump. Rams can be polled or horned, and all Karakuls have long ears that always point downward and slightly forward.

Their "low grease content" wool is a mixture of coarse and fine fibers, varying widely in color and pattern, and is used in making woven rugs, saddle blankets, wall hangings and outer garments. It is also excellent for felting.

"We have everything from really dark, shiny blacks to bright fall red, deep chocolate, white and chocolate mixes," Lynn explains. "The meat tastes wonderful and is fairly lean. Karakuls are very popular with people of Middle Eastern descent because they are familiar with them."

The breed possesses a strong flocking instinct, and can be run on open range as well as in fenced pastures, according to the Ameri-



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can Karakul Sheep Registry.

"When faced with danger, they will join together in a circle with the lambs in the middle," the registry's website points out. "They do not herd well, however; herding dogs find them a great frustration."

Karakuls breed out of season and produce three lamb crops in two years. The McKays say they've had a high percentage of twins, but the breed is generally more likely to have singles.

Lambs are born with beautifully patterned, short, curly coats that were once of major economic importance, due to their popularity in the fashion industry. The silky newborn lamb pelts, known as Persian Lamb or Boadtail, were used extensively in America in the early 1900's as a fabric for coats, jackets and hats. The breed was first imported to the U.S. in 1909, but was almost lost due to crossbreeding.

While large herds of Karakuls can still be found in Central Asia, Europe, and South Africa, the North American population is limited to small scale operations whose main interest has been to simply sustain the breed's presence here and preserve historical bloodlines.

When selling their stock, the McKays usually ask \$150 for unproven ram lambs, and \$200 for unproven ewe lambs. Bred or proven, or champion ewes sell for \$250 to \$350.

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Black Mountain Sheep Known For Mild-Flavored Meat

A rare breed of sheep from Britain is popular for its pure black wool, but its meat is just as unique. Welsh Black Mountain Sheep were first imported to North America in the early 1970's and have been spreading slowly since. Still in expansion phase with only culls likely to be butchered, breeders have discovered that unlike other breeds, even older animals taste good.

"The meat is very tasty and remains mild into old age," says Oogie McGuire, secretary/treasurer, American Black Welsh Mountain Sheep Association. "We butchered and ate a 16-year old ewe, and she was fine. We've also butchered a 6-year-old ram during breeding season, and it wasn't as strong as some supermarket lamb. We can wait until a lamb is two years of age with no loss of tenderness or taste."

Selling breeding stock is also a good bet. The 140 to 150-lb. rams sell for up to \$700 and the 100-lb. ewes for up to \$500. McGuire says the features that attract buyers are the breed's ability to do well without grain and the fleeces that are prized by hand spinners and weavers.

Welsh Blacks produce medium to medium coarse, yet very springy wool used for sweaters and rugs. Wool clipped from a sheep that has had a coat on it to protect the fleece can sell for as much as \$16 per lb. Unfortunately, only 1 to 2 lbs. of wool per animal may qualify for that high price.

Currently, there are only about 800 head of the special breed in North America, split among a small number of breeders, most of whom have only a few head in their flocks. Great Britain has an estimated 8,000 to 9,000 head and is expanding. British Welsh Black Mountain Sheep are quite productive, averaging a 175 percent lambing rate. Perhaps because of its limited genetic base, North American ewes average only about 125 percent. McGuire says that number varies from flock to flock, as



Rams sell for up to \$700 and ewes for up to \$500.

some breeders select for multiple births while other select for more meat or wool.

Another feature breeders tend to like is the breed's hardiness and disease resistance. McGuire, a Colorado breeder, lambs her ewes outside. Tails are left undocked, unlike most breeds, as the bare underside of the tail doesn't hold moisture or attract flies the way a woolly tail does.

She warns that predators can be a problem, as the breed tends to spread out on pasture, rather than flock together protectively. She has lost sheep to both mountain lions and coyotes, though tight fencing and guard dogs have helped.

Because of the small number of breeding animals, the association works closely with even small flock owners. "We try to make sure that no one flock is from a single bloodline," says McGuire. "If a flock comes up for sale, we try to find breeders to take it."

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