

Maple Ridge Sheep Farm Twilight Visit September 26, 2003

Overview:

Maple Ridge Sheep Farm is owned by Linda and Tuthill Doane. The sheep are managed by Linda, who is also a spinner. They raise Shetland sheep, which are a breed that predates the Vikings. Shetlands are suited for wool; the more grain they eat, the longer their hair grows. There are 11 official colors of Shetland wool, and 33 variations, which is the widest variety of naturally-occurring colors in any sheep breed.

Linda's income comes primarily from breeding stock. This herd was the first imported into the US, and is of excellent quality. Linda keeps the ewes for sale in separate paddocks for easy viewing. Her stock tends to generate yellow rams, which is unusual and very popular. Additional sources of income include her handspun fleece, finished products, and culled animals, which are sold for meat. Her animals are grass fed only, so they are lean, and their fat does not develop an off flavor as the animals age.

The sheep are sheared once or twice per year, depending upon their wool growth. When sheared, each fleece is wrapped separately, and hand skirted, which simply means that unattractive pieces of wool and hay are removed by hand. The quality of Shetland wool is very high, which allows Linda to get higher price per pound than some other producers.

The sheep are rotationally grazed through approximately 40 paddocks. Rams are pastured together, as are brood ewes, and adolescents. A guard llama stays with the brood ewes and protects the farm from coyotes. Linda indicated that the llama would jump any fences to protect the herd, and she cited examples of a llama chasing coyotes into the woods and completely off the farm.

Linda uses a group of smaller, shedlike buildings to manage the animals, rather than one large barn. The sheds are on skids and moveable, can each store 300 bales of hay, fencing, or animals. Each shed has its own paddock, which allows Linda to enclose up to six different rams with groups of ewes. Only one shed has power, so she runs power cords to the different shed during lambing season, which runs for three weeks in April. Linda pointed out the safety of this arrangement; the only time there is a danger of fire hazard, she is in the barns nearly 24 hours a day. She also noted the tax advantages of non-permanent (moveable) buildings, and the insurance advantages of exposing smaller buildings to fire damage.