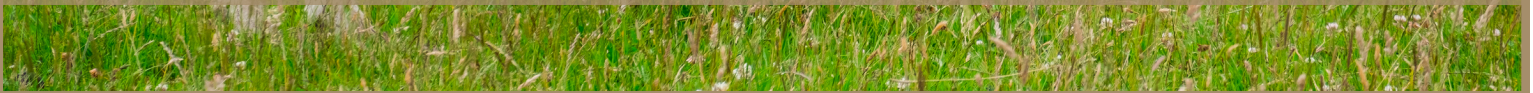


# Sheep



Sheep are a species of livestock. They are a small, ruminant animal. Sheep are primarily raised for wool, but some are raised for meat and milk. Alpaca, bison, muskox, and some breeds of rabbits and goats are other kinds of animals that are raised for their wool.

There are over 200 breeds of sheep in the world. They come in different sizes, shapes, and colors, and have a variety of unique types of wool. There are around 53,000 sheep being raised in Illinois alone, producing around 160,000 pounds of wool a year.



The removal of wool from the sheep is called shearing. Wool straight from the sheep is greasy and dirty and has to be cleaned, or scoured, before it can be used for different products. For many years, sheep were sheared with hand shears that look like big scissors. Today, electric shears are more popular as they are faster and reduce the possibility of cutting the sheep's skin.

Different parts of a sheep's body have different types of wool. The wool will differ in quality, crimp, length, and strength. The diameter of the wool fiber is important in determining the quality and price of the wool. Once the wool is sheared, cleaned, and dyed, it can be spun into yarn. The yarn is then used to make clothing and other textiles.







# Meet AJ Harris

Harris Livestock | Jacksonville, IL

## Tell us about your farm.

Harris Livestock was started ten years ago, but raising sheep has been a family tradition for years. We started with only 6 ewes. Since then, we have grown to over 150 ewes. On our 300-acre farm, we also grow corn, soybeans, wheat, rye, and oats. We have 15 acres of year-round pasture, plus we also use an electric fence system around fields that we plant rye on for the sheep to graze. Our sheep are raised for meat, but there are other breeds of sheep that are raised for their wool.

## What kind of sheep do you raise and why did you choose those breeds?

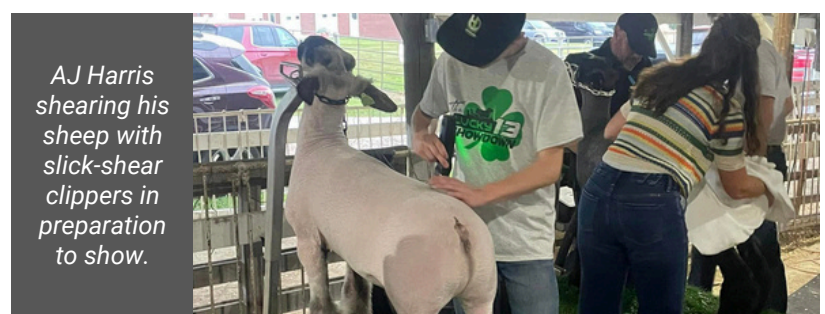
We have several breeds of sheep on the farm. My sheep include Suffolks, Hampshires, Oxfords and Shropshires. Suffolks are one of my main breeds and I chose this breed to carry on the family tradition. My grandpa raised Suffolks when he was growing up and showed them in sheep shows all around Illinois. I raise the Hampshires, Oxfords and Shropshires as market sheep that I can show and eventually sell to market.

## How do you take care of your sheep?

The sheep are fed once or twice a day depending on age and time of year. They need clean water and hay daily. We monitor them for health and treat them when needed. We also have to keep their hooves trimmed as their hooves grow just like our toenails do.

## What do you do to prepare to show your sheep?

When getting ready for shows I have to wash the show lambs to get them clean before they are sheared. Once they are washed, I put them on a stand and use a blower, which is just like a big hair dryer, and we blow out their wool until they are dry. After that I shear the lamb, which takes about an hour per sheep. I use my slick shear clippers, which cuts the wool really short. I also brush the leg wool to fluff it out and make sure they are clean and nothing is stuck in them.



AJ Harris shearing his sheep with slick-shear clippers in preparation to show.