

An introduction to wool judging

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Hair → Wool

Artificial selection

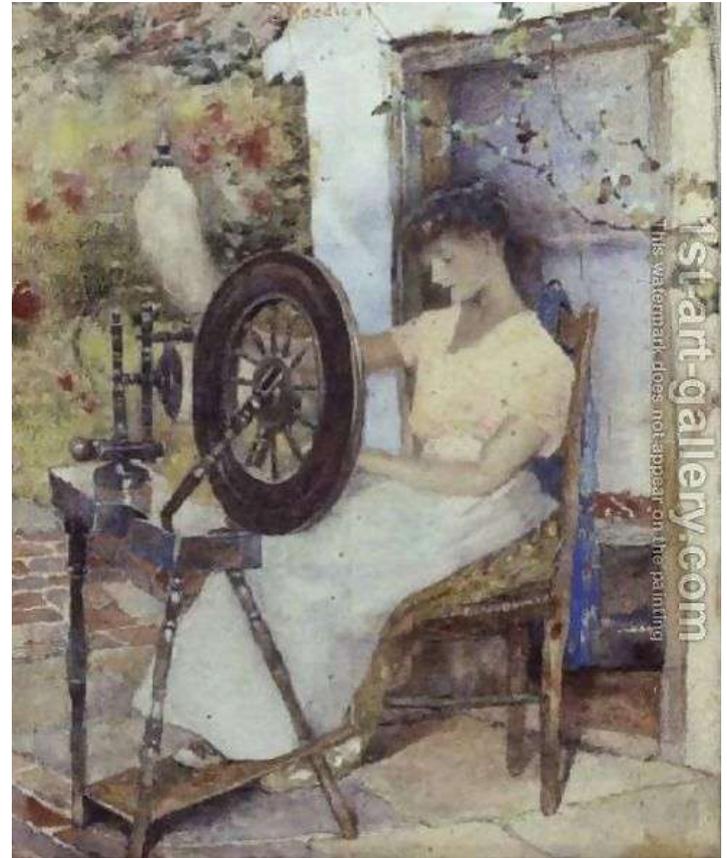


Mouflon – ancestor to all domestic sheep breeds



Wool history

- First commodity to be traded worldwide
- Columbus brought sheep to Cuba and the Dominican Republic on his second voyage to America in 1493.
- In Colonial times
 - Massachusetts passed a law requiring young people to spin
 - Spinning duties fell to the eldest unmarried daughter
 - Wool trading in the colonies was a punishable offense (punishment was cutting off the right hand)
 - Despite the King's attempts to disrupt wool commerce, the wool industry flourished in America



Sheep vary considerably in the type of wool they produce.



Fine wool from Merino

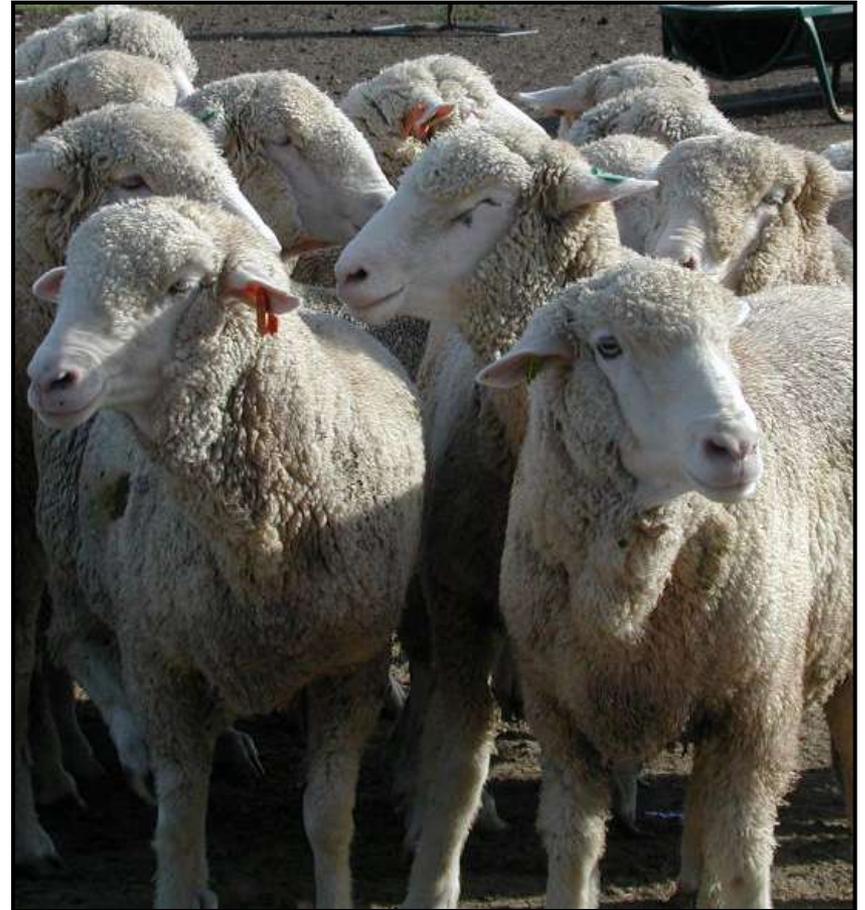


Carpet wool from a Karakul

One type of wool is not better than the other. They just have different uses.

Breeds of sheep are grouped according to the type of wool they grow.

- Fine
Rambouillet, Merino
- Crossbred (fine x medium)
Targhee, Corriedale, Columbia
- Medium (fine x long)
Suffolk, Hampshire, Dorset, Cheviot, Montadale, Southdown, Shropshire, Tunis, Polypay
- Long (coarse)
Romney, Border Leicester, Lincoln, Cotswold
- Carpet or double-coated
Scottish Blackface, Karakul, Icelandic
- Hair (shedding) - not sheared
Katahdin, Dorper, Barbado



Rambouillet (fine wool) sheep



Talk like a
woolgrower

Fleece

The wool from one sheep.



Grease or raw wool is wool as it is shorn from the sheep.

Sheared off in one piece.



Clip

The amount of wool shorn from the sheep in one flock.

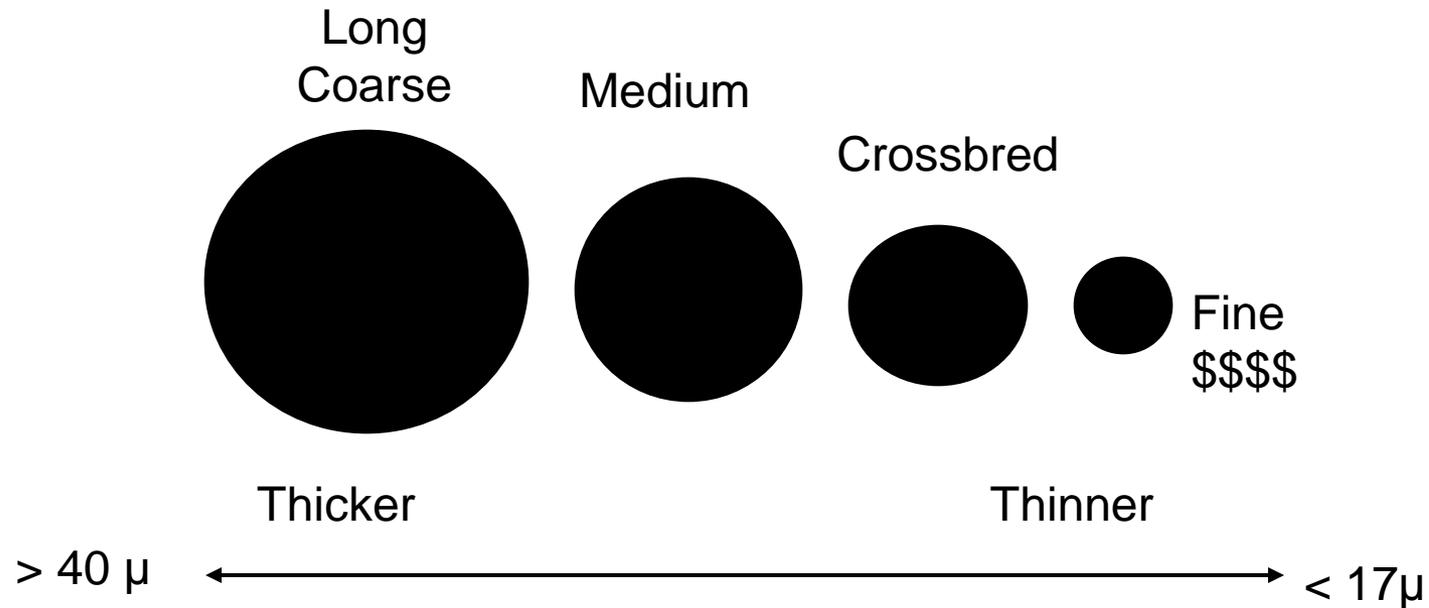


Fineness – fiber diameter



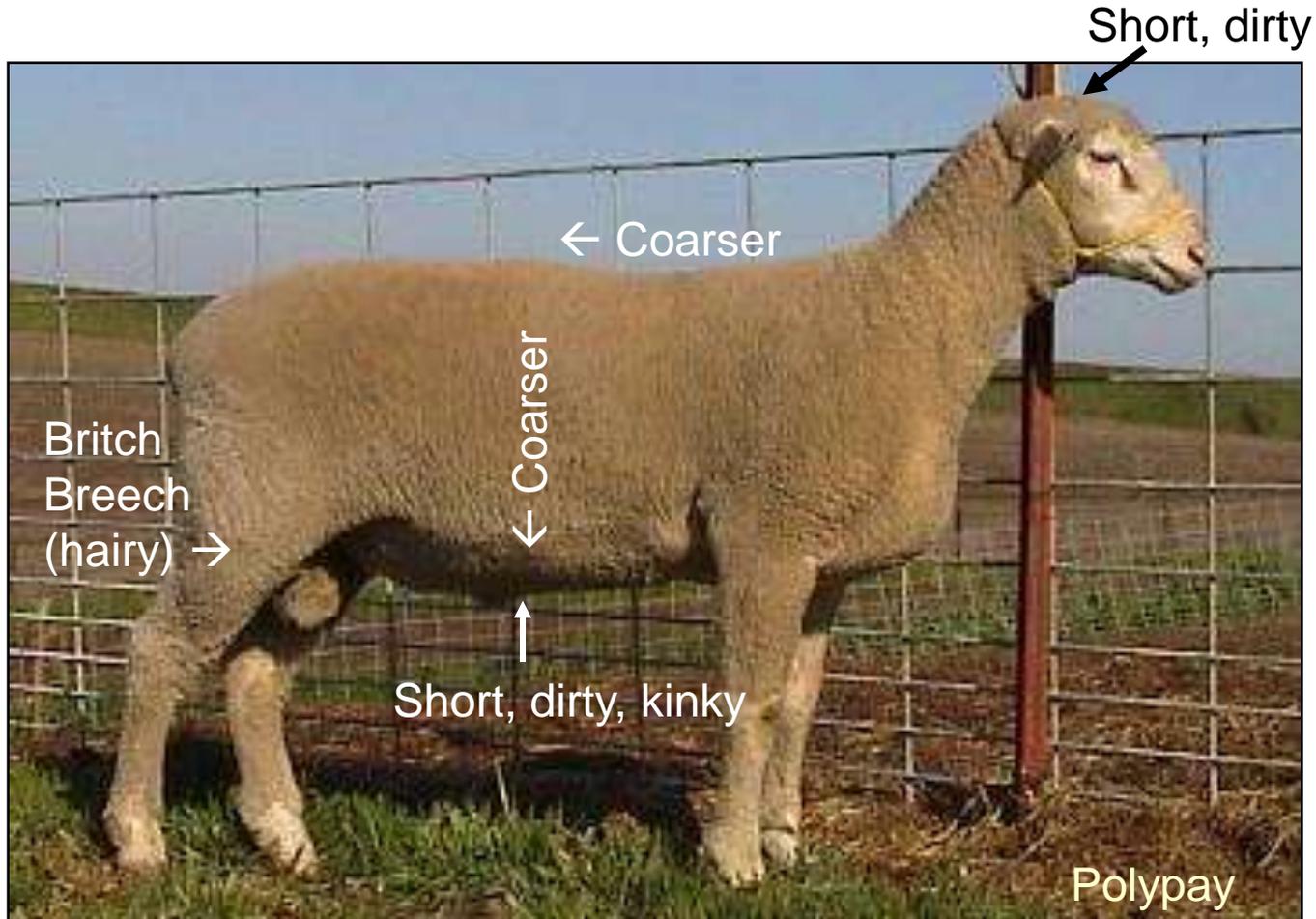
Thickness of the wool fiber
Measured in microns (one millionth of a meter - μ)

Fineness - fiber diameter



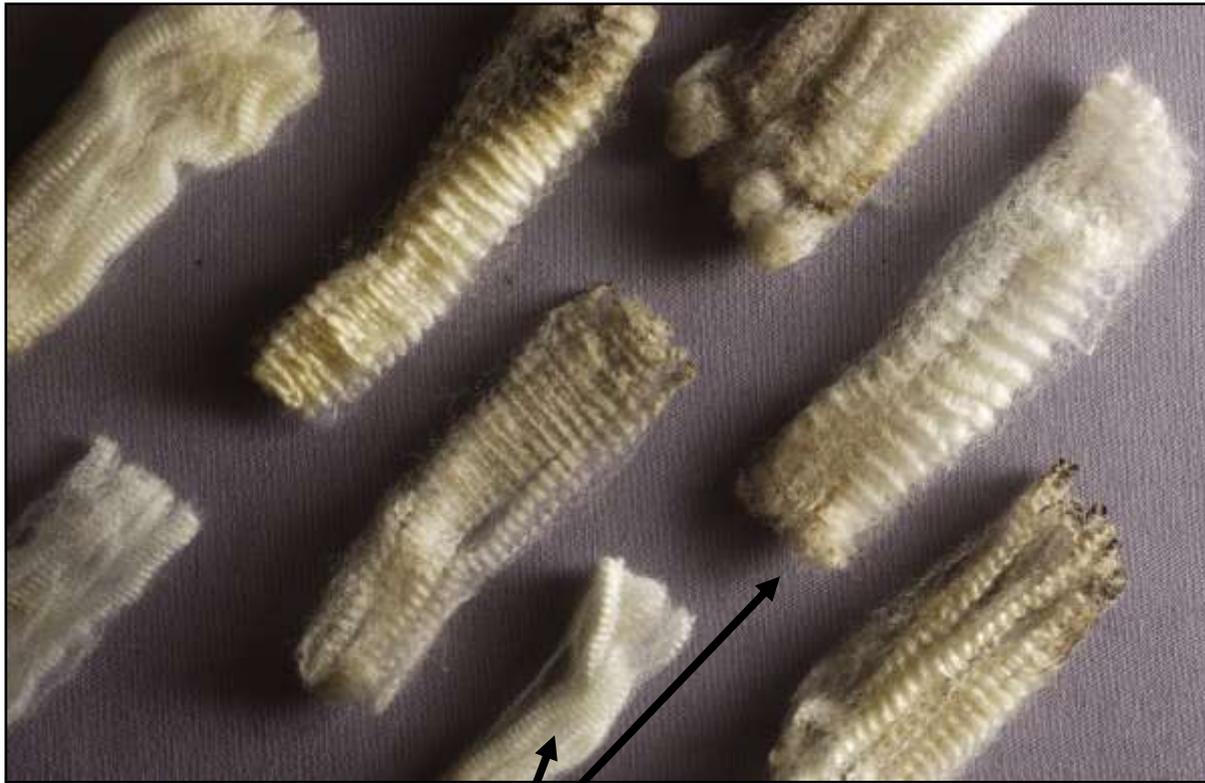
Grade refers to the relative diameter of the wool fibers (fineness).

Fiber diameter



Crimp

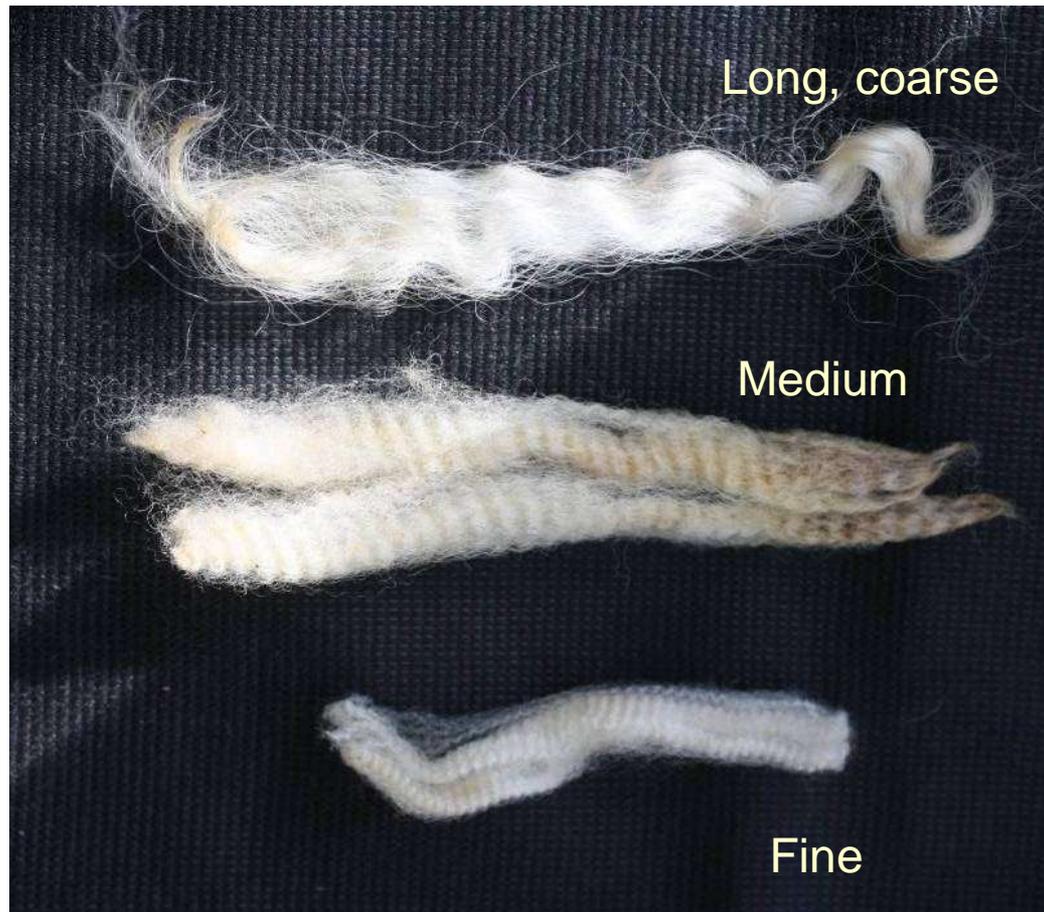
The natural curl or waviness in the wool fiber.



Fine wool usually has more crimp per inch than coarse (long) wool.

Staple

Refers to the length of a (unstretched) lock of shorn wool.



Coarse wools are usually longer than finer wools.

Vegetable matter (VM)

Any material of plant origin found in the fleece (hay, grass, seeds, etc.)



High VM lowers yield.

Tag

Wool that has manure attached to it.



Lanolin

A natural oil extracted from sheep's wool.



Used to make
ointments and
cosmetics.

Also called wool wax, wool fat, or wool grease.

Skirting

Removing the stained, unusable, or undesirable portions of a fleece (bellies, top knots, tags).



Show fleeces and other high value fleeces should be skirted at the time of shearing.

Wool judging



Wool judging score card

| Characteristic | Points |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| Estimated clean yield | 35 |
| Length | 25 |
| Quality or fineness | 10 |
| Soundness (strength) | 10 |
| Purity | 10 |
| Character and color | 10 |
| Total points | 100 |

You will judge “like” (same type or grade) kinds of wool.

Yield

The amount of clean wool that remains after scouring. Expressed as a percentage.



Wool yield is quite variable: 40 to 70%.

Long wools have higher yields than fine wools, due to less grease.

Bulky fleeces have higher yields.

Clean wool yield = Raw wool – shrinkage (VM, grease, impurities)

Vegetable matter affects yield



Other contaminants: soil, dust, polypropylene from tarps, feed sacks, and hay baling twine, paint, skin, external parasites, and foreign objects.

Length

Staple length adds weight to the fleece more than any other characteristic.



➡ Look for uniformity of length

Quality or fineness



Appropriate grade for breed or type.

Look for uniformity of grade (fineness).

Finer wools are permitted less variability.

Soundness (strength)

Tender wool is wool that is weak and/or breaks due to poor nutrition or sickness.



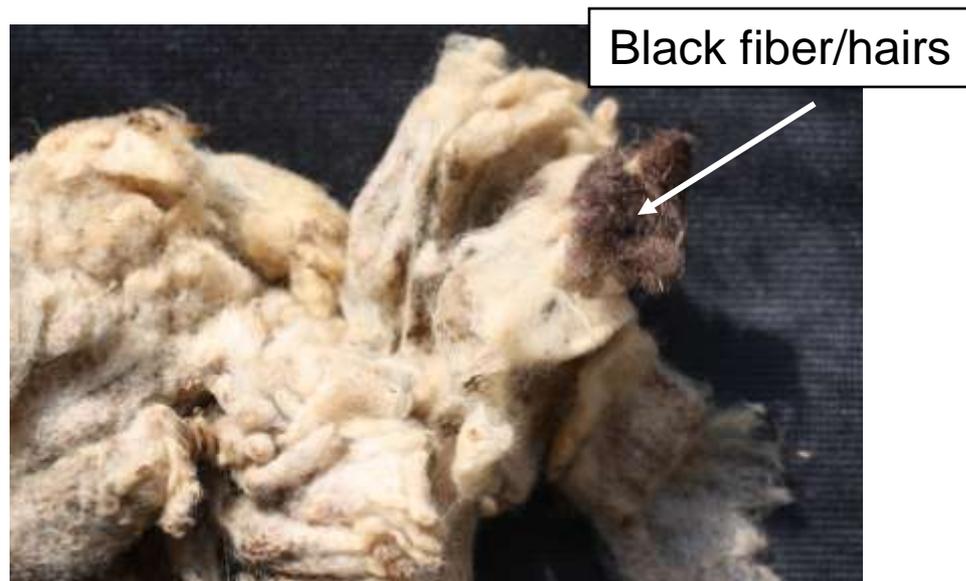
This wool does not have a break or tender spot.

Purity

Freedom from pigmented fibers, hair and kemp.



From a hair sheep



The commercial wool market favors white wool that can be dyed any color.

Character

General appearance of a fleece:
crimp, handle, and color.



Weathered tips

Affects dyeing



Wool classing

at the Maryland Wool Pool

| Grade | Type of wool | 2008 price per lb. |
|---|---|---------------------------|
| Choice white-face | Wool from fine wool and their crosses: Rambouillet, Merino, and Targhee; some Corriedale, Columbia, and Polypay | \$ 0.76 |
| Medium white-face | Wool from white-face medium wool meat breeds: Dorset, Cheviot, Texel, Montadale, etc. | \$ 0.55 |
| Coarse white-face | Wool from long wool breeds: Romney, Border Leicester, Lincoln, Cotswold, etc. | \$ 0.49 |
| Non white-face | Wool from breeds with dark fibers and color hairs on their faces and legs: Hampshire, Suffolk, Shropshire, Southdown, Tunis and speckled-faced sheep. | \$ 0.47 |
| Short | Less than 3 in. length. Lamb's wool, tags, belly wool, old wool, dirty wool, tender wool, | \$ 0.39 |
| <i>Black or gray wool or fleeces from hair sheep or their crosses are not accepted.</i> | | |

Wool sold to the niche (specialty) markets typically brings a lot more money.

Do you have any questions?

