

**Fine Fleece Shetland Sheep Association  
Handbook and Evaluation Packet**



The Fine Fleece Shetland Sheep Association (FFSSA) Handbook and Evaluation Packet was developed using both the 1927 Shetland Flock Book Breed Standard and Appendix A, which is the clarification of The Breed Standard. Appendix A was created by the Shetland Sheep Society (SSS) in 2001. The SSS sub-committee traveled to Shetland and reviewed the 1927 Standard with the breeders on the Island, some of whom were the original authors. Clarifying notes were added where deemed necessary.

The FFSSA agreed that the Standard and Appendix A are both relevant and significant to the future of the breed's reputation. Consequently, they were incorporated into the bylaws of this organization. It is the hope of FFSSA that breeders and judges can view this information as a means of identifying what the finer points of the breed are in Shetland where the breed originated and understanding where the specific verbiage originated.

This packet consists of 16 distinct Shetland Sheep traits. The word-for-word verbiage from the 1927 Standard and Appendix A are presented in bold font. The pictures and additional text were added by a FFSSA committee based on the statements Ms. Kate Sharp and Mr. Alan Hill, certified SSS inspectors, breeders, and judges, presented in a 2011 FFSSA produced documentary. The FFSSA Board of Directors felt their input was helpful. Additional sources in compiling this document were provided by FFSSA historical research and information from other SSS breeders, judges, and inspectors.

The goal of the FFSSA is to ensure the understanding of the original intent of the 1927 Standard, clarified by Appendix A. Thus, North American breeders can be better equipped to preserve the characteristics that made the Shetland breed famous for future generations.



# 1927 Shetland Breed Standard with Clarifications by Appendix A

## I. General Character and Appearance (horned or hornless) – 9 points/100

Should state that both ‘round in section’ and angular are acceptable.

**Reason:** For clarification. The Standard does not indicate a preference, and early photographs of Shetland Sheep examined by the Committee show both.

Should also state that polled rams and horned females are acceptable.

**Reason:** For clarification. There are early-recorded observations, which refer to both, i.e., ‘Shetland Sheep’ as published in ‘The Field’ on 10/3/1927, and a very good photograph of a polled ram published in the book ‘Farm Livestock of Great Britain’ before 1927.

Should also state that the horns of a ram should rise in a curve above the head and then spiral round according to the age.

**Reason:** The rise of the horn is an important distinguishing feature of the Shetland Sheep. Described in ‘The Field’ on 10/3/1927.







Examples of proper rise, proper spacing, and round shaped and angular D shaped (on cross section) horns on rams.

## II. Head – 9 points/100

Good width between ears, tapering rapidly to base of nose, which should be broad and with little taper to muzzle, hollow between cheeks and nose well marked.

Basically, clear as written, but the sub-Committee highlighted that the reference to 'well marked' referred to the hollow between the 'cheeks and nose' being clearly distinguishable.



Great Shetland heads.



### **III. Face – 5 points/100**

**Medium length of face from eyes to muzzle, nose prominent but not roman, small mouth.**

**Reference to a ‘small mouth’ means not large lipped, droopy, or pouty lipped, with a mouth in proportion to the size and shape of the face, with a proper taper reducing down to a small mouth.**

**Reason: For clarification. If ‘small’ mouths were bred for as a Shetland characteristic, it would result in overshot mouths. Probably originally highlighted to distinguish this feature from other breeds such as the Cheviot or Suffolk.**



Properly tapered head and face.

### **IV. Eyes – 3 points/100**

**Full, bright and active look.**

**Clear as written, but should be expanded to say ‘ideally slightly bulbous’.**



Ram showing bulbous eyes, i.e. set on the outside of the face and not into the skull.

**V. Ears – 4 points/100**

**Fine, medium size, well set back, carried slightly above the horizontal.**

**Clear as written.**



Ewe with medium sized, well set ears that are slightly elevated.

**VI. Neck – 4 points/100**

**Full, tapers into a fairly broad chest.**

**Should state that a Shetland should have a clearly defined neck.**

**Reason: See in conjunction with shoulders.**



Ewe with prominent shoulders and clearly defined neck.  
Long skinny necks are a fault, but not a disqualification.  
This ewe has a proper neck, with correct shoulders.



**VII. Shoulders – 6 points/100**

**Well set, top level with back.**

**Needs considerable clarification.**

**Reason: A sheep must have withers to enable it to move freely. ‘Well set’ means not too narrow, but set properly between neck and back, showing a promontory (slight hump) thus defining the neck which would otherwise be lost in the back.**

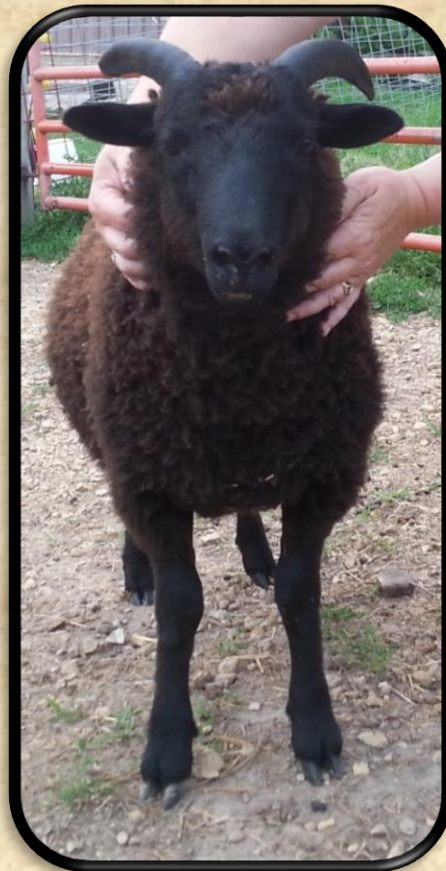
**It also means that the shoulder blades should slope from the front towards the back, not straight up.**

This is best evaluated by feeling the shoulders with your hands. The shoulder blades must be clearly delineated from the neck and back, but should seamlessly join them.

**VIII. Chest – 5 points/100**

**Medium width and deep.**

**‘Medium’ means medium in proportion to the size and conformation of the sheep.**



Good chest width showing a hand's breadth between the legs.

**IX. Back – 9 points/100**

**Level with as much width as possible.**

**Clear as written, but could be annotated that ‘level’ means parallel with the ground, and the width of the pin bones determines the width of the sheep.**

When assessing the back, it is the area past the shoulders to the rump. The sheep’s back should be level to the ground and not be higher in the front or back.



Level back with shoulders evident.

**X. Ribs – 4 points/100**

**Well sprung and well ribbed up.**

**Should be clarified by changing to ‘well sprung from back around side’.**

**Reason: As written is saying the same thing twice, and not with much clarity.**

The rib area should be relatively barrel shaped (rounded) and not flat sided.

**XI. Rump – 5 points/100**

**Good width, with well-turned rounded hips.**

**Clear as written.**

The intent here is that the sheep’s rump is rounded and not angular or flat. The back should curve naturally from the hip to the lower leg and not transition abruptly. Wool can tend to hide an incorrectly shaped rump. Assessment is done by feeling from the pin bones to the lower leg.





Correct rump, level back, proper tail and legs.

## **XII. Tail – 9 points/100**

**Fluke tail. Wool at root forming the broad rounded part, and tapering suddenly to a barely covered fine point. This is a strong character, and any crossing is easily made out of it. Length varies according to size of sheep, rarely exceeds six inches or thereby.**

**Clear as written, But ‘thereby’ should be replaced by ‘thereabouts’, and the description expanded by stating the tip of the tail should be covered with hair, not wool, and should preferably be flat, not round or plump. A good tail seems to fit tight into the fleece on the rump as compared with the fat long tail of many breeds.**

One way to further assess the fluke shape is to flip the tail over and look at the underside that is free from wool. It should be triangular in shape and between 4” and 6” in length. The top two thirds of the tail should be covered with wool and the bottom one third should be covered with hair. The flatness of the bone can be felt near the end of the tail.

Correct fluke shaped tail with hair on tip.



**XIII. Legs of mutton – 4 points/100**

**Light, but very fine in quality**

**This term has nothing to do with the legs from the hocks down, but is clear in the context of the quality of the ‘leg of lamb’ in modern terms.**

**As far as lower legs are concerned, in general terms they should be light boned and free from wool below the hock in the adult sheep. Viewed from behind, the rear legs should be perpendicular from the hock to the pastern, and should be wider apart than the fore legs. The pastern should have a medium slope, and show no signs of weakness. Feet should be well shaped and small in proportion to the sheep. Reference to early photographs illustrates his latter point clearly.**

Shetland sheep are a primitive breed, but they still possess what is called in Shetland a ‘good joint’. This is the amount of muscling on the leg. The quality of the muscling can be determined by placing the hands around the muscle.

**XIV. Skin – 2 points/100**

**Varies according to the colour of wool. In white no blue or black colouring.**

**Clear as written.**



Pink skin on a white fleeced sheep.



**XV. Wool – 20 points/100**

**Extra fine and soft texture, longish, wavy and well closed. Wool on forehead and poll tapering into neck, likewise on wool on cheeks.**

**Colours. White, black or brown, Moorit (from reddish to fawn), Greys (including Sheila). Other known colours; Mirk face (brownish spots on face), catmogit (black underparts from muzzle to tail and legs), Burrit (light underparts); also Blaegit, Fleckit, and Sholmit.**

**Should be clarified and expanded as follows:**

**Longish probably means 3” to 5” in full fleece. Certainly no Shetland should have a staple of 7”.** ‘The Field’ 10/3/27

**“Well closed”: medium density.**

**‘Wool on forehead and poll, likewise wool on cheeks’ to be clarified as ‘not in excess’. Reference to early photographs illustrates this clearly.**

**There should be no frill.** ‘The Field’ 10/3/1927.

**‘Wavy means what we now term as crimp. The Universal Dictionary defines crimp as ‘the natural curliness of wool fibres’.**

**A good description could read as follows:**

**Wool – Extra fine and soft above all else. Crimped, of medium density, and (length) 3 to 5 inches in full fleece. Breeches having coarser/longer wool, but not extending into thighs. Wool, not in excess, present on poll and cheeks.**

**We should also note that the colours listed in the Standard are not exhaustive.**



**Wool on poll and cheeks, prominent, but not overdone.**



The ideal fleece should be soft, crumpy, of medium density, and 3"-5" long when in full fleece. Time of shearing should be considered when evaluating fleece characteristics. Evidence of wool on the forehead, poll, and cheeks should be present.

Handle is the best way to assess the fineness and softness of Shetland fleece. It should feel 'alive', be bouncy, springy, and fill the hand. The feeling of fullness in your hand equates with density. Density can also be thought of as thickness so that fleece does not open in the wind, exposing the skin, and should require some effort to part the fleece upon examination. Annual fleece testing can be done, and the results compared to the FFSSA Fleece Chart.

Lock structure, crimp, and tip are important characteristics of Shetland fleece. Lock or staple structure is the grouping of wool fibers together. The staple can range in various widths depending on the curvature of crimp and fineness of the wool fibers. The curvature of the wool fibers can be sharp like the letter z in formation or more relaxed like the letter s. Shetland fleece has been described historically as cottony, silky, and soft and these characteristics determine the crimp and staple structure. The crimps per inch along the staple normally range between 8-12. There should be a slight tip on the end of the staple which helps shed rainwater, unlike a blocky staple. The combination of these characteristics is completely unique to Shetland fleece making it a world renown wool fiber.



Fine fleeces with smaller crimp showing staple structure.





Tiny, organized crimp.



The above lock lacks Shetland wool characteristics. It is about 7" in length, has no visible crimp, and has an exaggerated tip. While it may feel soft, it is not representative of the breed Standard as clarified by Appendix A.

**XVI. Carriage – 2 points/100**

**Alert and nimble, with a smart active gait.**

**Clear as written**

## **Disqualifications**

The 1927 Standard lists seven disqualifications. Disqualifying faults should be taken into consideration when evaluating sheep. It must then be determined if the fault is severe enough for non-placement in a class or removal from breeding. Generally, in competition, the best animals are pulled forward for consideration.

### **a. Long heavy tail, broad to point**

This is considered a serious fault and is indicative of crossing with other breeds of sheep within the Shetland population historically. A Shetland sheep that lacks a fluke shaped tail would not be disqualified for that fault alone, however if it is also 7" or longer and covered with hair, it adds to the seriousness of the fault.

### **b. Bad wool, coarse and open**

The standard is very clear about this. A coarse, open (meaning not dense) fleece should not feel scratchy (coarse) nor reveal skin unless the wool is forcibly parted by hand. An open fleece does not provide enough insulation against the elements.

### **c. Very coarse wool on breeches**

Shetland Sheep should have a small amount of britch wool. It is in the area on the lower hind legs and is slightly coarser than the body fleece. Britch is normally straight to wavy in appearance and is measured as a handful. It does not migrate upward towards the hip area. Disqualification applies to extremely coarse wool on the britch.

### **d. Deformities of jaws**

Evaluation of teeth and jaws is essential for the health and welfare of the sheep. The placement of the teeth should be on pad not an over or under bite. The upper palate should not jut out farther than the teeth (parrot mouthed) nor the incisors on the lower jaw protrude beyond the hard dental upper pad (monkey mouthed). Teeth can be visually inspected and/or felt by hand.

### **e. Undersized animals**

Shetland Sheep should weigh between 70 and 100 pounds for adult ewes and 90 and 146 pounds for adult rams. An adult Shetland is defined as one that is two years old or older.

### **f. Defective Coloured or badly shaped animals as sires**

The intent here is to eliminate animals that show colors not recognized by the breed standard. Also included here are obvious conformational defects in structure (cow hocks, weak pasterns, or improper proportions).



**g. White hairs in moorit and black, and dark hairs in white wool**

The exception to this rule would be Agouti patterned sheep that are a combination of dark and light fibers. Examples would be Ag grey or Ag musket sheep. These animals will have both dark and light fibers intertwined and can be either very dark or very light (almost white) in appearance. These sheep are often recognized by their light colored (sugar) lips and often also have lighter shading around their eyes.

**Summary**

This handbook was put together to help breeders and judges utilize the points of the Standard, with the clarifications of Appendix A, in a practical manner when evaluating Shetland sheep. Shetland Sheep belong to a group of sheep known as Northern European Short tails. They are considered a primitive breed and are unique within that group. As such, Shetlands should not be evaluated against the standards of other breeds.

When evaluating, determine if the sheep is free from any of the specific breed disqualifications, then proceed through the Standard. Examinations should include both visual as well as hands on. Sheep should be walked to determined soundness, correct movement, and alertness. Emphasis should be placed on the specific Shetland breed type characteristics and its unique wool qualities.

It must be remembered that no sheep meets the Standard perfectly and the subjectivity of the examiner should be taken into consideration. Above all, at the end of the evaluation, the sheep should be easily recognized as a Shetland sheep.







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FFSSA members breed for and label only graded, lab-tested wool.

