



**AMERICAN  
ROMNEY**



**AMERICAN ROMNEY BREEDERS**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>The History Of The American Romney</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Romneys - A True Dual Purpose Breed</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>The Romney as a Sire and a Dam Breed</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Romneys For Young Shepherds</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Romneys In The Show Ring</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>The Future</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Membership</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Registration</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Romney Breed Standard</b> .....	<b>12</b>



The American Romney Breeders Association thanks the following Romney breeders and friends who generously contributed to the text and photographs for this booklet: Gaylia Bullock, Larry Bullock, Jane Caulfield, Kim Caulfield, Morris Culver, John Landers, Mary Pratt, Al Schwider, Lin Schwider, Ron Starz, Suzanne Sears, Sue Kalina Barker, Jean Kamenicky, John Kamenicky, Chris Bazant, Cindy Ciecwa, Mitchell Long, Lois Aylestock, Carla Hellander and to everyone who helped in any way.

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2005 Edition

## THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN ROMNEY

The American Romney traces its beginnings to the marshy area of Kent in England. Its origin lies with the old, established dual purpose Romney Marsh breed which was improved with Leicester blood in the nineteenth century. Often swept with harsh winds and heavy rainfall, the Kent landscape is abundant with lush forage.

These geographic and climatic conditions have led to the development of some specific characteristics in the Romney breed. These traits include hooves that are resistant to foot rot and fleeces that remain healthy in harsh weather. Due to the similar land topography and weather conditions, the Romney breed made an easy transition to New Zealand and the Falkland Islands, where it became quickly established and still remains the predominant breed.

In 1904, William Riddell and Sons of Monmouth, Oregon, imported the first Romneys to North America, where their popularity increased rapidly. The American Romney Breeders Association was founded in 1912 by Joe Wing, a world traveler and a great judge of sheep. At one time with the University of California, he was an early secretary of the ARBA, and his expertise was instrumental in the development of Romneys in America.

The present-day American Romney is a product of English, and more recently, New Zealand blood lines, which have enhanced the progress of the breed, and helped maintain a diverse gene pool within North America. The first purebred natural colored Romneys were registered by the Association in 1972 by Morris Culver of Curtin, Oregon. In the last three decades, the popularity of Romneys has spread from the West Coast across the nation. With much recent growth coming in the middle and eastern states, the Romney has become a national breed.



## ROMNEYS - A TRUE DUAL PURPOSE BREED

The Romney, historically a dual purpose breed, remains so today, and is found in every type of farming environment. When handled properly, lambs from this versatile sheep can be creep fed until weaning, then turned out on pasture to mature, where they efficiently convert pasture into lean, high quality carcasses of heavy hanging weights that usually grade prime or choice. Romney meat is known for its delicate taste even in older lambs.

Demands by consumers for lean cuts of meat from well-muscled carcasses make it evident that the future of the lamb market rests with breeds having these attributes. The American Romney fulfills these needs, and will continue to be increasingly important in both large and small commercial programs.

The Romney fleece is unique among all breeds of sheep in the way it combines several important traits. The fleece is lustrous; it hangs in separate locks, with minimal cross fibers between the locks. It is also high yielding and easily spun. Uniformity of crimp from the butt to the tip of a lock is also typical of the breed. Romney wool has the finest fiber diameter of all the longwool breeds; the spinning count may run from 50 to 44 (equivalent to about 29-36 microns). Ideally, the spinning count of the fleece is consistent over the entire body.

It is the low grease content of Romney wool that makes it a very light shrinking fleece upon washing, and consequently high yielding. Since the value of a fleece depends on its clean wool content and not its grease weight, the Romney, whose fleece can boast a clean yield of over 70%, is one of the heaviest wool producers of all breeds.

Whether shorn once or twice a year, the wool clip from the purebred Romney flock is sought by commercial wool buyers and craftspeople. Its broad range of acceptable spinning counts enables Romney wool to be used for many products, ranging from sweaters to outer wear to carpets. For the commercial producer, incorporation of the heavy-shearing white Romney can add significantly to overall farm income.



The long, lustrous fleece, hanging in separate locks, also makes a white or natural colored Romney fleece especially attractive to those who practice the ancient art of handspinning. The fleece is easily spun in the grease or after washing and carding, and readily takes dye. The natural black, grey, silver and brown colors of the natural colored Romneys are frequently among the most sought after fleeces at shows and sales. A clean handspinning-quality fleece often sells for premium prices compared to what a commercial buyer would pay.

Although many other breeds have gone through several trendy changes over the years, the American Romney remains a practical, dual purpose breed, which forms the basis for many profitable sheep and wool enterprises. Breeders are continually striving for improvement, and the American Romney Breeders Association insists that the improvement come from within the breed.



## THE ROMNEY AS A SIRE AND A DAM BREED

The Romney is truly a versatile breed, as demonstrated by its ability to produce quality meat and wool under diverse climate conditions and management systems. This breed's quiet disposition, unique fleece characteristics, the flavor and quality of its meat, and its lambing percentage make it an excellent choice for purebred, commercial, or crossbred programs. These same characteristics, plus the handspinning qualities of the fleece, also make the breed attractive to the small, or spinners flock.

The Romney's versatility, as a top producer of both meat and wool, has enabled breeders to select for different traits in their breeding programs. Some emphasize large, long-bodied, fast-growing rams to produce market lambs. Others, who market the early or Easter lambs demanded by specialty markets, may prefer a smaller size.

The range of acceptable spinning counts allows breeders to select for coarser or finer fleeces, or they may choose to increase overall fleece weights regardless of spinning count. This has enabled the Romney to be adapted to the damp, rainy regions of both coasts, or to the near desert conditions of eastern Washington and Oregon. Numerous flocks boast a lambing rate approaching 200%; other breeders, preferring a range-style operation, may not be as concerned with prolificacy.



As a dual purpose breed, a Romney ram contributes several important traits as a sire. Rams begin to reach sexual maturity at six-to-seven months of age, and grow into medium-to-large sheep, weighing 175-to-275 or more pounds as yearlings. A Romney ram can add extra fleece weight to lambs from white-faced or black-faced ewes in a crossbred setting, and in the next generation will help correct the dark fiber found on lambs from black-faced ewes.

The offspring of Romney rams are suited to the dual purposes of lamb and wool production. The ram and wether lambs grow well from heavy-milking ewes, where weights of 50-to-70 pounds at 60 days of age are common. Ewes sired by Romney rams make excellent replacements for the commercial flock. They tend to lamb easily, and their higher quality, heavier fleeces are a bonus.

American Romney ewe fertility is repeatedly confirmed by high lambing percentages under varied feed and geographical conditions. Ewes can rear quality, high-scoring market lambs, while producing an 8-15 pound wool clip of excellent quality and a high clean yield. Other traits making the Romney a top mother breed are a calm, gentle disposition, prolificacy, milk production, ease of lambing, vigorous lambs, and natural mothering instinct.

Ewe lambs begin to cycle at 8-to-10 months of age, and mature ewes typically breed from September through January. In many flocks, ewes regularly produce twins and can feed triplets with proper nutrition.



## ROMNEYS FOR YOUNG SHEPHERDS

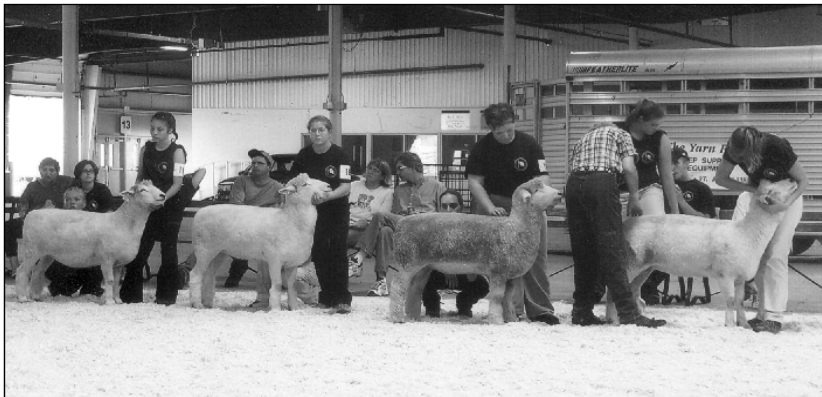
Many young people will find Romneys to be an ideal breed for showing and for establishing a purebred flock. Because Romneys are of quiet temperament and readily bond to a youth who spends time with them, they are easily trained for the show ring.

Romney fleeces offer youth a second opportunity to participate in fairs or shows because they often place very high in shows and frequently sell to handspinners directly from shows. Since Romney wool is one of the easiest to spin by hand, many younger shepherds learn to spin and may participate in spinning contests. Some create garments from their Romney wool and participate in lead line classes or make-it-yourself-with-wool events.

Many younger shepherds are increasingly turning to Romneys when selecting a breed to raise for project lambs. With some grain and good management, the lambs will reach an ideal 110-to-120 pound market weight in four-to-six months. Excellent market lambs can also be produced by crossing with any traditional meat breed.

Another consideration for young people is raising Romneys for sale as breeding stock. The breed's expanding popularity provides opportunities to sell to other youth or adults.

Whether youth choose Romneys for breeding or market lambs, the animals can grow to be fine sheep that will be a credit to the breed and show off a young person's ability as a shepherd.





## ROMNEYS IN THE SHOW RING

The purpose of breeding Romney sheep is the production of high quality meat and wool, and breeding animals for both the small flock and the commercial sheep industry. There are several tools that may be used to evaluate the success of a breeding program. These include extensive record keeping, progeny testing, and competition in the show ring. The showing of Romney's provides an opportunity to promote the breed and to evaluate your individual breeding program.

Preparation for showing should include the following:

**FEEDING:** An adequate food supply is necessary for proper muscle and fleece development. Romney sheep grow well on good pasture, supplemented with grain and hay when necessary. Lush green pasture, when available, or grass and legume hay in winter will provide the bulk of needed feed.

**FOOT TRIMMING:** As with all sheep, feet should be kept trimmed to the pad to insure their health and proper gait. All dirt and manure should be cleaned away before showing.

**FLEECE PREPARATION:** Romneys may be lightly rinsed with plain water within six weeks of showing. Washing with soap removes the lanolin, may alter the crimp, and detracts from the normal fleece formation. For a clean appearance, dung tags should be removed and the wool on the belly shorn. The tips of individual locks should be trimmed to improve general appearance. Carding, if done at all, should be done carefully to avoid damaging the crimp. Blanketing, if done at all, should be minimized, and done with loose-fitting blankets to prevent packing the wool.

**INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO:** The American Romney Breeders Association has produced a video on fitting Romney sheep for show. It is available through the Association Secretary, the website or the district directors.



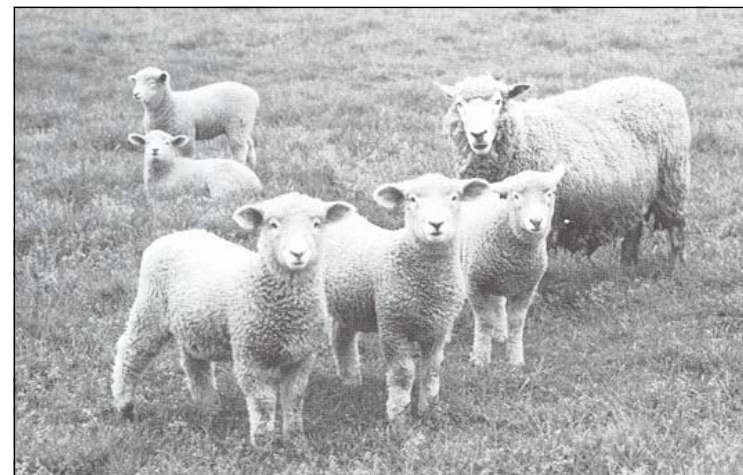
## THE FUTURE

Although Romney sheep have traditionally been considered best adapted to the Pacific Slope and the Eastern Seaboard of North America, improved sheep and pasture management practices have made the Romney an attractive breed in most areas of the United States and Canada. They are extremely adaptable to many environments, and wherever good green grass may be grown, the breed will flourish. Breeders in all parts of the United States and Canada demonstrate the wide acceptance of the breed.

The Romney has evolved as a pure breed for over 250 years. Many breeds of sheep developed in this century, including the Coopworth, Perendale, Romeldale, and California Variegated Mutant, owe much of their genetic parentage to the Romney. Commercial shepherds find the Romney valuable in commercial flocks as purebreds or for crossbreeding programs. Romneys, correctly selected, breed true to breed character, give consistent lambs, and make improvements in the quality and quantity of the wool clip.

Their excellent mothering traits and good meat conformation make them equally useful as both a sire and a dam breed. This durable, versatile sheep is not only a beautiful breed, but it is becoming increasingly known for its commercial qualities as a food producing animal with adequate growth rate and the type of heavy, lean carcasses demanded by the commercial trade. The Romney's ability to mature on pasture is helping to meet this demand.

The future is indeed bright for Romneys.





## MEMBERSHIP

Any resident of the United States or Canada who breeds Romneys or is interested in them is eligible to become a member of the American Romney Breeders Association. Any person desiring membership may contact the Association Secretary to complete a membership application and pay the fee set by the Association. Annual dues are set by the Association. A junior membership is available to persons under 21 years of age at a reduced rate.



## REGISTRATION

The Association maintains a permanent record of the breed and protects the standards of excellence which breeders seek when buying pedigreed Romneys. The policy of the ARBA has been, and still remains, that improvement in the Romney sheep must come from within the purebred confines of the breed itself.

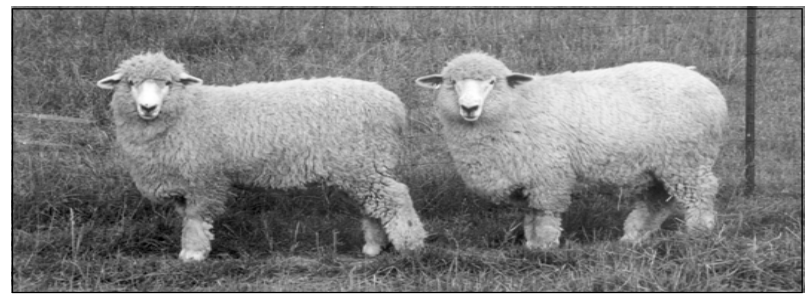
When registering animals, the Romney breeder must abide by the by-laws of the association. Breeders should be aware that making full use of scientific material, progeny testing and record keeping results in satisfied clients when they purchase animals.

Natural colored and black-factored white Romneys carry genes for colored wool. To clarify record keeping, any Romney sheep registered with the Association that has had any colored ancestors in its genetic history will have a capital "B" after its registration number. A second letter ("B" or "W") will indicate physical color; "B" for natural colored or "W" for white.

The Association has also established strict standards and applications for artificial insemination of ewes. Contact the Association Secretary for additional information prior to beginning the process.

Each breeder should use a private ear tag or tattoo with a unique number on it for each animal. This must be done prior to, or at weaning. Breeders must also choose a farm name for their flock, or use some form of their own name or initials, along with the farm tag number, when registering sheep.

Application for the registration of animals must be presented to the Association Secretary on forms provided by the ARBA. A fee schedule and registration requirements are included on the form.



## ROMNEY BREED STANDARD

### APPEARANCE AND BODY CONDITION

**1. General.** Romney sheep should exhibit the essential qualities found in all good meat sheep. They should be sturdy animals with a strong bone structure, and balanced, capacious bodies. Romneys should have a strong constitution, the ability to adapt to varying environments, and a uniform fleece characteristic of the breed. Emphasis should be on an animal of large capacity, exhibiting strong breed type, perfect balance and alertness. The Association insists that the improvement of the breed come from within the purebred confines of the breed itself.

**2. Head and Neck.** A desirable animal has a relatively broad face, large clear eyes, and alert, thick felted ears. White ears are desirable but minor black spots are acceptable. The head should be carried high and be level between the ears. Nostrils should be black or dark, mottled grey. Solid pink noses should be discriminated against. The neck should join smoothly with the shoulders. The poll should be free of horns and hair.

**3. Top Line.** The back should be straight with smooth blending from the neck and ending at a square rump.

**4. Legs.** Front legs shall have a slight curvature above the knee, shall be straight from that point down and shall be wide set. Rear legs should have a slight natural curve from a side view, and be straight and widespread from a rear view. Pasterns should be strong and upright. An otherwise good sheep should not be disqualified if the hooves exhibit some light color, although black is desirable.

**5. Udder or Scrotum.** Ewes should have well-formed, even udders with two good teats. Rams should have two large, even, well-developed testicles.



### FLEECE

**1. General.** The character and architecture of a Romney fleece is unique in the way it combines several important traits. The fleece should be dense and free-opening, with well-defined crimp and a yearly staple length of five inches or more.

**2. Character.** Romney wool is well crimped from butt to tip. Uniformity over the entire body, length, and spinning count are most important. The fleece is lustrous; it hangs in separate locks, with minimal cross fibers between the locks. It is also high yielding and easily spun. The fleece should be clean, and must be free of kemp and hair.

**3. Color.** White Romney fleeces must be free of black or brown fiber. Small black spots on the ears are acceptable. For Natural Colored Romney fleeces, fibers must be pigmented. Colors range from very light (almost cream) to gray to very dark (black) with variation or variegation of the shades of color within the fleece.

**4. Luster.** The fleece should exhibit a bright, shiny, healthy appearance.

**5. Quantity.** Annual fleece production should be eight pounds or more for ewes, and 12 pounds or more for rams.

**6. Grade.** Wool with a spinning count of 50 to 44 inclusive (equivalent to a fiber diameter of about 29-36 microns) is within the breed standard.

### SCORECARD.

Due to the different emphasis on wool, different scorecards have been developed for white and natural colored Romneys.

	WHITE	NATURAL COLORED
General Appearance	10%	5%
Condition	10%	5%
Head and Neck	5%	5%
Forequarters	5%	5%
Body	15%	10%
Hindquarters	15%	10%
Wool	40%	60%