

As handspinning becomes more popular in the UK and elsewhere in the world, selling raw fleece directly to handspinners is becoming a way of adding value to any flock. For those with unusual breeds and good quality fleece, handspinning fleeces can be a significant source of income.

In 2009 a good quality fleece was worth at least £5 to £10, plus postage if applicable. Coloured, fine wool fleeces may be worth considerably more.

How to find handspinners for your fleece

- Simply putting a 'Handspinning fleece for sale' board at the farm gate may bring some people to your door!
- Let your breed associations know you're selling, as handspinners often contact them.
- The UK Association of Guilds of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers has local guilds and affiliates in many places; check their website (www.wsd.org.uk) for information about groups near you.
- Try to find wool festivals, shows or craft fairs with fleece shows. Visiting one is a good way of seeing what handspinners expect in a top-quality fleece. Some, such as Woolfest, have fleece sales.
- Craft shops and yarn shops may be willing to put a small card up on a noticeboard. Spinners visiting the area may ask at Tourist Information Offices for places to buy handspinning fleeces.
- Some farms have found it worthwhile to set up websites to sell fine fleeces.

If your fleeces are of good quality, spinners will spread the word: there are farms that sell out of handspinning fleece every year.



Contacts and links

British Wool Marketing Board Head Office
Wool House, Roydsdale Way,
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West Yorkshire BD4 6SE
Tel: 01274 688666 Fax: 01274 652233
mail@britishwool.org.uk

The Rare Breeds Survival Trust www.rbst.org.uk

The British Coloured Sheep Breeders Association
www.bcsba.org.uk

The Natural Fibre Company offers fleece processing and spinning services, as well as fleece FAQ sheets for download.



www.thenaturalfibre.co.uk The Natural Fibre Company

The Association of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers is the parent body for over 100 local guilds in the UK and through the Online Guild has members in many countries worldwide. It is our remit to preserve, improve and promote expertise in hand weaving, spinning and dyeing; and to encourage excellence of craftsmanship in texture, colour and design. We support this series of leaflets as we can see positive benefits to all our members. www.wsd.org.uk

Ravelry is a website where knitters, spinners and other fibre craftspeople from across the world meet. There is information about handspinning fleeces in some forums, and there are UK-specific groups such as *UK Traders* in which you could mention that you sell fleece. www.ravelry.com

This leaflet is one of a series planned for free distribution to encourage and improve links between UK wool producers and handspinners.

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THE WOOL CLIP
For all things WOOLLEN

A Cumbrian co-operative of wool workers & producers, members of which organise Woolfest.

woolfest 

producing & selling RAW FLEECE for handspinning



Sarah Wroot June 2010

¹⁷ Sheep shearing in the early 19th century.

Am I allowed to sell my fleeces to handspinners?

YES. Under paragraph 70 of the British Wool Marketing Scheme (Approval) Order, any fleece sold directly to a handspinner to be processed by hand, by that spinner, is exempt from the BWMB scheme. This is in addition to the relatively well-known rare breed exemption, under which fleece from the following native breeds can be sold outside the Scheme: Balwen, Boreray, Castlemilk Moorit, Hebridean, Leicester Longwool, Lincoln Longwool, Llanwenog, Manx Loaghtan, Norfolk Horn, North Ronaldsay, Portland, Soay, and Teeswater. It is less widely known that rare breed crosses are also exempt.

What do handspinners look for in a fleece?

- Poorly clipped or sheared fleeces** are less valuable than expertly clipped fleeces.
- If it's sold as being of a particular breed, then it must have the **characteristics of that breed**.
- It must be **skirted**: all dags, tags, and clumps of wool that are felted or matted with mud should be removed. When in doubt, remove it! Postal Regulations specifically prohibit sending 'filth' through the post, and spinners do not appreciate paying for unspinnable lumps. Also, thorough skirting minimises the possibility of spreading animal disease.
- The fleece must be **sound**, without weaknesses. Stress, illness, medication and late shearing can create a weakness in the fibres that means they will break while the spinner is processing the fleece. If you suspect a weakness, take a small sample lock of fleece, hold the tips firmly in one hand and the base in the other and quickly pull the lock tight. If individual fibres snap, the fleece is not sound.
- No stains** from sprays, crayon or raddle. Any coloured markings must wash out with household soap and water without leaving a stain on the wool.

There are flaws that will decrease the value of a handspinning fleece. These include:

Second or double cuts, the short tufts of wool on the underside of the fleece that are caused by the shearer cutting an area twice.

Large quantities of **scurf** or dandruff.

Large amounts of **plant matter** from feed or vegetation embedded in all parts of the fleece.

Kemp (individual hairs that are strikingly coarser and white or paler than the rest of the fleece) is regarded as undesirable except in breeds where it's a known feature of the fleece.

Equally, there are features that may increase the value of the fleece:

Softness: spinners preparing yarn for garments prefer finer fleeces.

Attractive colours, including sunbleached (but not brittle) tips.

Staple length: longwool spinners are generally interested in the longest locks.

Shearing

- Be sure that the wrapper knows what makes a top-quality fleece for handspinners, so these can be put safely to one side during the clip. This is much easier than sorting through the pile later, and reduces contamination.
- If you've got one or two animals with particularly good fleece, it may be worth shearing them before any others and keeping those fleeces to one side, labelled with number, animal's name (if it has one), age, and sex: useful information for you and for the handspinner.
- If you have several breeds, send them through in batches by breed, starting with those with the finest fleeces to prevent contamination. For example, Blue Face Leicester would be sheared before Swaledale or other hill breeds with rough, vegetation- and kemp-filled fleece.

Tagging and storing fleece for sale

Handspinners need and want information about how the sheep were kept. It's *extremely* important not to sell fleece that might be contaminated by dips or sprays. Always include a note with the fleece stating the date and type of last dipping or any other chemical application.

We suggest making up tags to supply the following information with each fleece:

Your address;

Breed, including any cross if appropriate;

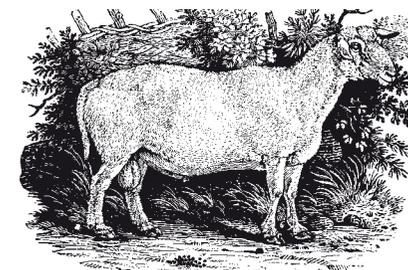
Date of shearing and weight of fleece;

Date of last dipping and type of dip used;

Accreditation: any scheme under which the sheep was raised. Organic, Conservation Grazing Scheme, Environmental Stewardship – all of these may raise the value of the fleece.

Individual fleeces should be bagged in clean paper or hessian bags, never in plastic, and stored somewhere dry. If the bags are labelled with the year and breed it may be easier to find a specific fleece when needed. It may be worth keeping a rough record of the fleeces you have on hand, as well as the weight, breed and price of those you sell. The Wool Marketing Board would appreciate a copy of your records to ensure that the local depot can estimate how much fleece from each breed won't be available for auction.

If handspinners visit in person to purchase a fleece, they will want to see the fleece, and will expect to be able to test a lock or two for soundness. Some may wish to unroll the fleece and inspect it more carefully.



An 18th century woodcut of "the old or unimproved Tees-water sheep, before the improvements begun by Mr Bakewell."