

Shave 'Em to Save 'Em

Improving Profitability in Rare Breed Sheep

By Jeannette Beranger
Senior Program Manager, The Livestock Conservancy

The Problem

Heritage breeds offer vital genetic diversity for agriculture. Without healthy markets for their products, many are at risk of extinction. These sheep have lost their jobs as standardized manufacturing and commercial breeds dominate markets. Cheap wool imports from have further challenged U.S. producers., in particular those with small flocks. With low market prices, wool from traditional breeds is often simply discarded. This leaves the producers without the opportunity of economic benefit beyond meat sales.

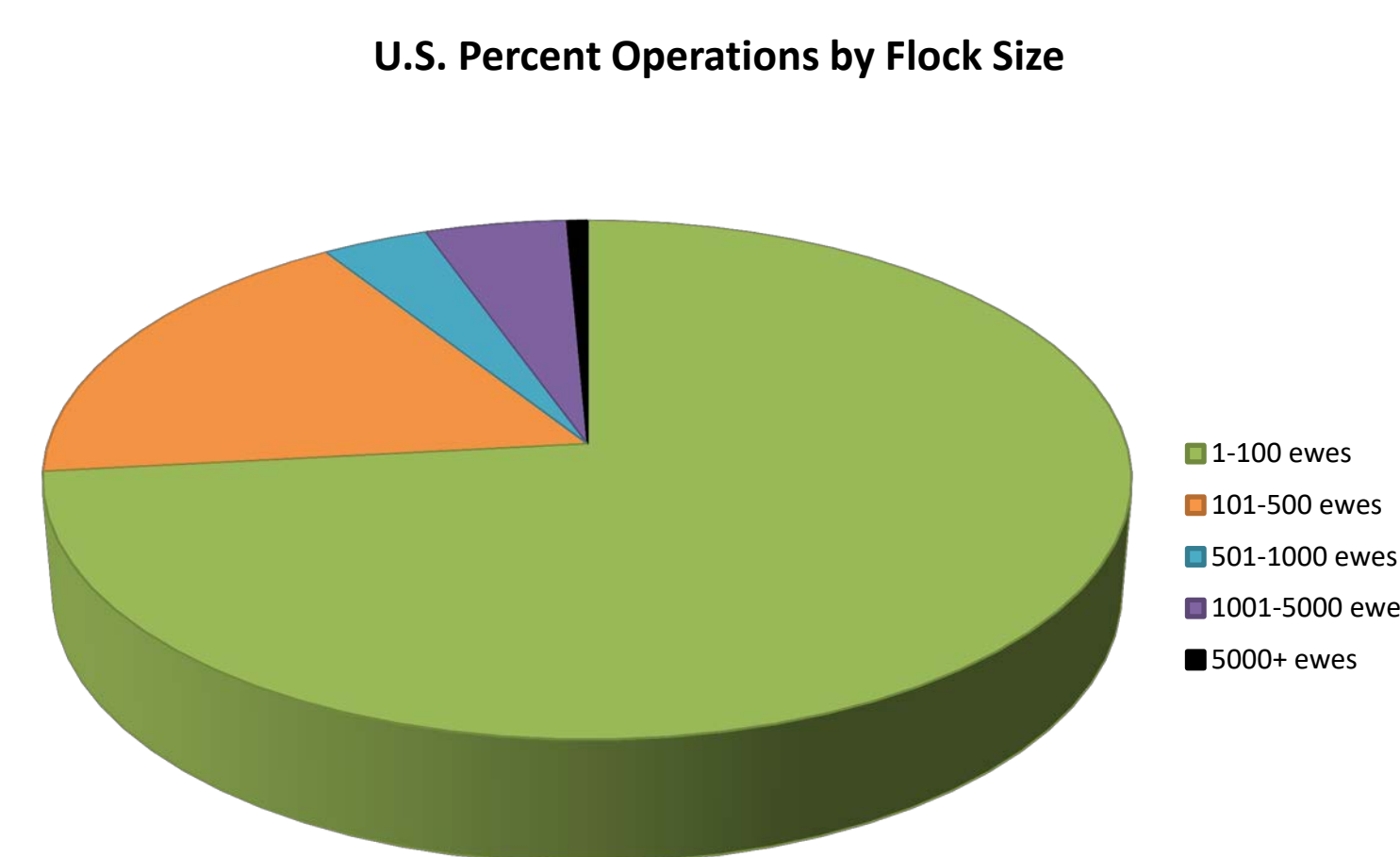


Southdown Sheep

Objectives

- Develop pilot project *Shave 'Em to Save 'Em* connecting artists & heritage wool
- Challenge artists to explore the diversity of non-commodity type wool
- Expand rare breed sheep producers' client base
- Educate shepherds new to wool production and marketing
- Make raising traditional breeds more economically viable for small producers

Smallholders make up the majority of sheep producers in the U.S.



U.S. Sheep Industry Research, Development, and Education Priorities, American Sheep Industry Association, Inc. (June 2016)

Method

- Fiber artists and shepherds sign up as program participants
- Shepherds receive stickers to go with wool sales
- Artists get “passport” book to place sticker as proof of wool origin & breed
- Artist create projects from the 22 breeds on The Livestock Conservancy’s Conservation Priority List
- Artist photographs project with passport & sticker
- Every 5 projects earns a prize for artist



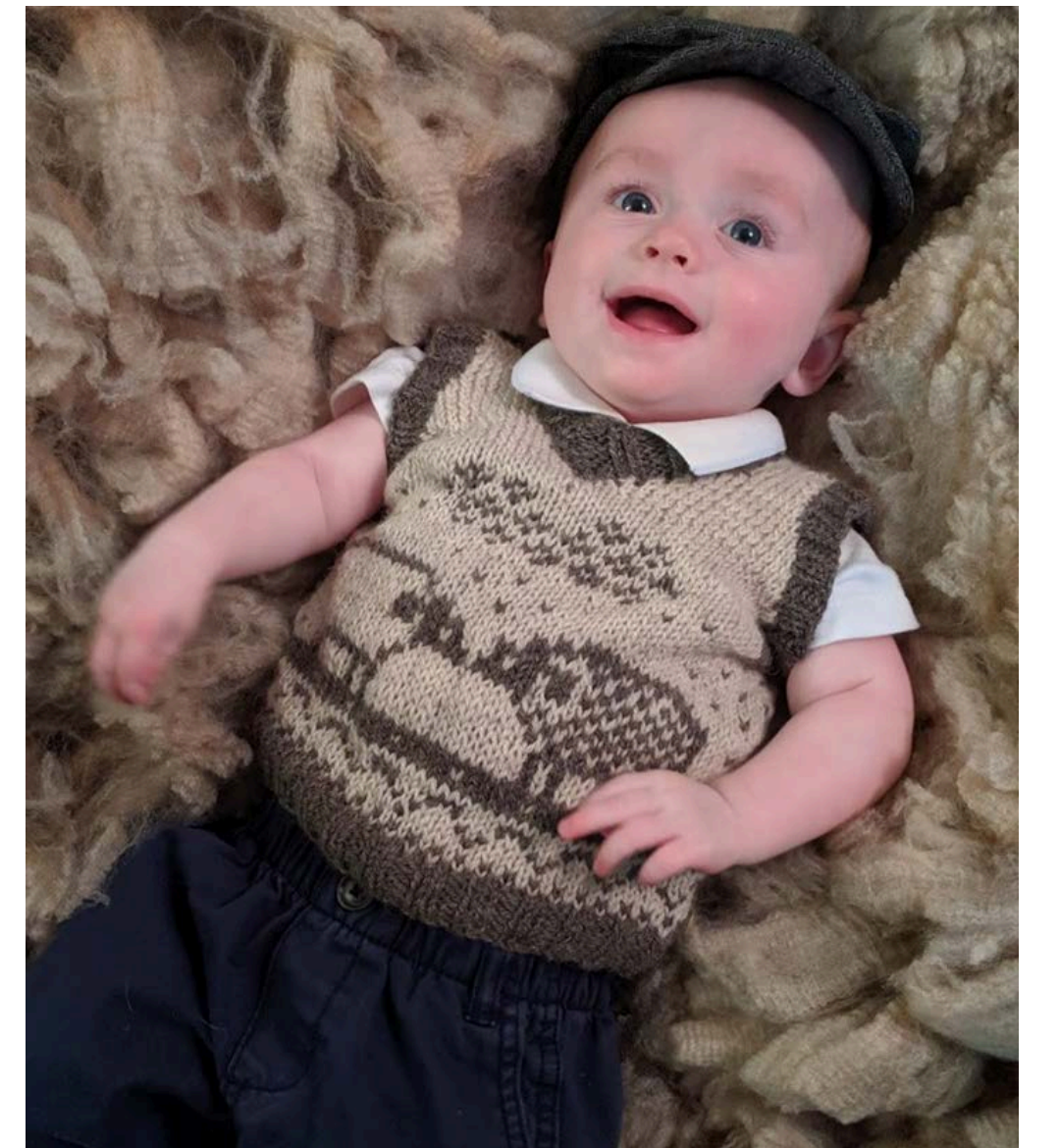
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Shepherdess Louise Fairburn and her Lincoln Longwool wedding dress.

Opportunity

Fiber arts are booming! Ravelry is the leading on-line community connecting knitters, crocheters, and anyone else working with fiber. As of spring 2019 they have over 7 million users on the platform.



Project Results

Since the launch in February 2019:

- Over 1200 fiber artists signed up
- Over 500 fiber providers and shepherds participating
- 3000+ members posting on Shave 'Em to Save 'Em Facebook page
- Nearly 1000 members on Ravelry fiber arts forum
- Rare breed wool market and prices improving for many breeds



Commodity prices from Spring 2019 USDA Farm Service Agency data. Heritage breed prices based on average sales prices of Shave 'Em to Save 'Em participants.

Next Steps

- Secure funding to expand the program
- Create educational opportunities for shepherds, shearers, and artists
- Expand the program with our sister organizations in Canada and the UK
- Increase the number of shepherds working with heritage breeds

For more information www.livestockconservancy.org