

How to Buy a Shetland Sheep

By Faye Whitney, NASSA Executive Secretary

You've seen our wonderful Shetland sheep at fairs, shows, or fiber events. You've researched what it takes to own and care for livestock. You've studied the literature on Shetlands. It's time to take the plunge and buy your very own starter flock of Shetlands. What's the best way to go about it?

If you are at all serious breeding and selling sheep, or continuing various bloodlines, or simply wanting to add your records to the NASSA database, you should buy only registered animals. It may seem tempting to spend less money and get grade (unregistered) stock, but NASSA does not allow upbreeding so any offspring from your unregistered animals will never be able to be registered. Registered sheep will initially cost more than unregistered, but the same holds true when, in a few years, you start to sell sheep. You will get a better price for sheep with papers. From here on, I am going to assume you will be looking for registered animals.

If you are reading this on our website, finding breeders in your area is easy and just a few clicks away. On the front page of the NASSA website is a tab called "Find Breeders." That will lead you to a map of North America. From there you can click on your state, or nearby states, and a list of breeders will pop up.

The names are listed with the breeders who have been in business the longest on the top. That list will also tell you their location. To find out more about individual breeders click on the "i" square next to their name. Once there, the first thing to check is their membership status. If the breeder's membership is not current they are not allowed to sell or transfer sheep. If you are looking for registered stock, now is the time to move on to look at another breeder.

Additional information on each breeder's page will include their address, phone number, email, and often a website. In some cases, the listing will also tell the flock size. In general, the larger the flock, the better the chances of that breeder having sheep for sale.

From there it's up to you whether to make a phone call or send an email. Most Shetland breeders are happy to talk or email with others interested in our favorite breed. Also, if the breeder you contact doesn't have sheep for sale, they may be able to direct you to someone nearby who does. But please, continue to check each breeder's membership status before making contact, to make sure they are able to sell registered sheep.

If you have any questions about a breeder's membership status feel free to contact me at secretary@shetland-sheep.org

By far, the most common query I receive is from people who have purchased sheep and have not received the registration papers. The reasons for the lack of papers are varied, but the buyer is often left with purebred sheep, who cannot be registered and whose offspring will be unregistered as well.

Several years ago, NASSA revised the registration policy to allow either the buyer or the seller to send in transfer papers as long as the seller's signature was on them. It was felt that the buyer might have more of an impetus to submit the paperwork than the seller, since the buyer would now be in possession of the animal.

This has worked to some degree, but there remains the problem of what happens when a buyer purchases an as-yet unregistered, but registerable, animal.

The reasons for not registering, or properly transferring ownership, are varied. Often the seller is not a NASSA member, which is why I've urged you to check the membership status of anyone you may be contacting. Sometimes people are getting out of the sheep business and just want the sheep sold. Some people feel that "the piece of paper" is not all that important. It's not, until you want to show your sheep, or sell registered offspring. Plus, it removes purebred sheep from the database.

I expect most NASSA members have run into this situation at some point. I admit, I have in the past purchased "registered" sheep and never received the papers.

There are several things that could make this situation easier for all. First, make sure a bill of sale is exchanged (see an example of a bill of sale elsewhere on this page). This should, at minimum, list the buyer's name, the seller's name, a description of the sheep including any ear tag numbers and registration number if available, the date of purchase, and the price. Both buyer and seller should have copies. Get a separate bill of sale for each animal.

This seems to be a logical document to have, but many times the sale of our sheep is a "friendly" one and the buyer may feel awkward asking a friend for a bill of sale. It should be done for the protection of both buyer and seller.

If the purchased animal is not yet registered the buyer should ask the seller for copies of the registration papers of sire and dam. The copies will obviously not be on Registry-issued certificate stock so there will be no question of duplicate registrations, but the buyer will have the necessary information in case the seller does not complete the registration papers on the unregistered offspring.

If the seller cannot produce copies of the sire and dam's registrations, the buyer should be very cautious about going through with the sale. At that point, the buyer should be aware that he might very well be purchasing an animal that, while possibly purebred, most likely cannot be registered. It is sometimes possible, with a bit of sleuthing and some added expense, to trace lapsed registrations back and end up with a registered sheep, but it is more than likely not going to work out well.

With all of the registered Shetlands now available, it is easy enough to find another sheep to buy that has all its paperwork in order, and the vast majority of Shetland breeders are honest, helpful, and willing to give advice to new sheep owners.