WHEN YOU THINK of sheep, you probably think of white, round, wooly little animals that produce fiber for clothing. You might even think of meat for a meal or special occasion. How about goats? Do you think of friendly little animals found in petting zoos, always willing to take your handful of food? Did you know that goats also produce meat, milk, and fiber? There are many different breeds of sheep and goats, each bred for a specific purpose.

Objectives:

1. Identify common breeds of sheep found in the United States.
2. Identify common breeds of goats found in the United States.

Key Terms:

Angora  dairy goat  Pygmy
Boer  Dorset  Rambouillet
Cashmere  Hampshire  Shropshire
Cheviot  Merino  Southdown
Columbia  Montadale  Spanish Goat
Corriedale  Oxford  Suffolk

Breeds of Sheep

CHEVIOT

The Cheviot breed is a smaller type of sheep with a square body. It has short legs and erect ears that make it appear jumpy at all times. A Cheviot does not produce a heavy fleece, but
when raised for meat production, it produces a nice carcass. The fleece, head, and legs of the Cheviot are white, and the nose is black. Cheviot sheep originated in England and were brought to the United States in the mid-1800s.

**COLUMBIA**

The *Columbia* breed is a large type of sheep with a square body and longer legs. It is a wool breed with a heavy-producing fleece and acceptable wool quality. The Columbia has a heavy wool coat over all the body and legs, along with a wool cap. The muzzle is white. The breed tends to produce a nice carcass. Columbia sheep were developed in the United States in the early 1900s to graze the mountain terrain while producing wool and meat.

**CORRIEDALE**

The *Corriedale* breed is similar to the Columbia except that it has a medium-sized body. It, too, is a wool breed, producing a high-quality fleece. The fleece, head, and legs are white. Corriedale sheep were developed in New Zealand in the early 1900s. They were imported to the United States to graze the ranges of the western states.

**DORSET**

The *Dorset* breed is medium sized and produces a lighter fleece. It was developed in southern England to produce a higher-quality meat carcass. The Dorset’s fleece, legs, and face are all white, and it has a wool cap. Dorset ewes have high fertility and can produce either fall or spring lambs.

**HAMPshire**

The *Hampshire* is a larger breed that is popular in the United States. Hampshires are efficient producers of offspring, and they milk well. Their lambs grow quickly and are ready for market at or shortly after weaning. Hampshires were developed in southern England and were brought to the United States as a meat breed. They are popular in the Midwest and are commonly found at livestock shows. The Hampshire’s legs and face are black, and it has a wool cap. The breed produces a lighter fleece.
MERINO

The Merino is a wool breed that produces a high-quality, heavy fleece. It originated in Spain and was brought to the United States because of its ability to flourish in poor grazing conditions. The Merino has wool on its legs and cap and has a white face. Rams have horns; ewes are polled. Merinos come in three types—A, B, and C. Types A and B have heavily wrinkled skin, whereas type C has few wrinkles. Type C, known as Delaine Merino, is the type most commonly found in the United States.

MONTADALE

The Montadale is a medium to larger breed, with a fair-quality fleece. It was developed in the United States as a meat breed from crossing Columbia ewes with Cheviot rams. The Montadale’s head and legs are white and do not contain any wool. The breed produces a high-quality carcass.

OXFORD

The Oxford is a slightly larger breed with a square body. It was developed in England by crossing three different breeds. The Oxford’s face and legs are brownish, with a wool cap that hangs down toward the ears. The breed produces a heavier fleece that is good in quality. Oxford ewes make excellent mothers, with high milk production and fast-growing lambs.

RAMBOUILLET

The Rambouillet is a wool breed, producing a high-quality fleece. It was developed in France using the Merino breed as a foundation. The Rambouillet is a larger type of sheep with a fast-growing fleece. It was a very popular breed in the United States from the late 1800s through the mid-1900s. Rambouilletts produce heavier-muscled carcasses than Merinos but are not as desirable for meat production as breeds developed specifically for that purpose.

SHROPSHIRE

The Shropshire breed is medium to smaller in size and produces a lighter fleece. It has wool on its legs and cap, with a dark color on its face and lower legs. Shropshire ewes are excellent mothers, with high lambing rates and good milk production. They produce smaller carcasses and often become very fat if fed for meat production. The breed was developed in England.
SOUTHDOWN

The Southdown is a small breed with a square body and short legs. It has a gray coloring on the face and legs and tends to produce a lighter fleece because of its small size. It matures early but grows slowly and often becomes too fat if fed for meat production. The Southdown is one of the oldest breeds of sheep developed in southern England.

SUFFOLK

The Suffolk is a large breed developed in England in the 1800s. It is one of the most popular breeds in the United States because of its ability to produce excellent carcass lambs. The legs and face of a Suffolk are black, with no wool covering them. Suffolk ewes have a high lambing rate and grow quickly. The breed produces a fair fleece, but Suffolks have been bred for meat production in the United States.

Breeds of Goats

ANGORA

The Angora breed is popular in the southern regions of the United States where the climate is dry and grazing is sparse. The animals thrive on grazing brush and woody plants found in these regions. Angora goats produce mohair, a type of fleece popular in the textile industry for making clothing. They originated in Turkey and were bred for both meat and fleece production. There are several different types of Angora goats. They are medium to large, and their fleece grows rapidly. The fleece becomes coarser with age. Younger animals produce the most popular mohair.

BOER

The Boer breed is an extremely popular meat breed in the United States. The Boer is a large goat that produces a high-quality carcass and has a high production rate. The breed was developed in South Africa for meat production and brought to

FIGURE 2. Goats thrive in poor range conditions. (Courtesy, Agricultural Research Service, USDA)
the United States to fill a void in the goat meat production industry. A Boer goat is mostly white, with red on the head and some solid patches throughout the body. Boer goat bucks mature rapidly, whereas does mature more slowly.

CASHMERE

Cashmere goats are not technically a recognized breed. They typically produce a high-quality much-in-demand fiber for making clothes. High prices can be obtained for solid-colored fibers. The majority of Cashmere goats are found in the Middle East and Asia, but they are becoming more popular in the southern regions of the United States. Goats that produce Cashmere are typically crosses of different breeds, with selection based on fiber quality and solid-colored coats.

DAIRY GOATS

The dairy goat industry includes several different breeds, with French Alpine and Nubian being the most popular in the United States. Goat dairies are common in many countries as sources of milk, but in the United States they cater to more of a niche or specialty market. Dairy goats can be found throughout the United States, with larger production in the southern and western states. The French Alpine is a medium-sized goat originating in France. It comes in a variety of colors and may be solid or display diverse patterns. The Nubian is a medium-sized goat originating in England. It, too, comes in a variety of colors and may have various types of markings. A Nubian is most recognizable by its droopy, elongated ears hanging down the side of the head. Both breeds do well in fair to poor grazing conditions. Other breeds that may be found in the United States include the LaMancha, the Saanen, and the Toggenburg. However, they are not as widely distributed as the French Alpine and the Nubian.

PYGMY GOATS

The Pygmy goat breed is the smallest of the domesticated breeds. The animals have short legs and smaller bodies that are all in proportion to their small size. Pygmy goats tend to be friendly and are popular in petting zoos because of their calm nature. While they do make good pets, they can also be raised for meat production. Their color pattern varies from shades of gray, black, and white to a roan or striped pattern. Pygmy goats originated in Africa.

SPANISH GOATS

The Spanish Goat is a medium-sized goat raised in the poor range conditions of Mexico and southern regions of the United States. Spanish goats thrive on poor forages, brush, and woody plants. They were developed as a dual-purpose breed for meat and milk production but
are more commonly found in meat production systems. Spanish Goats come in a wide variety of colors. Their coats may be solid or have patched markings.

**Summary:**

There are many different breeds of sheep and goats found throughout the United States. Nearly all were developed to adapt to some type of climate or environment while still producing a product. Sheep are typically raised for either meat or wool, but some are fair producers of both. Goats can produce milk, meat, or fiber. It is important to select the appropriate breed for the type of production and the environment in which the animals will be raised.

**Checking Your Knowledge:**

1. Name two breeds of sheep bred primarily for wool production.
2. Which breed of sheep is most popular in the United States? Why?
3. Name a breed of goat raised for its fleece.

**Expanding Your Knowledge:**

Visit a county or state fair to see the different breeds of sheep and goats popular in your area. Determine the main production purpose of each breed (meat, milk, fiber). Compare and contrast similar breeds, and identify those that may be related because of similar traits.

**Web Links:**

- Breeds of Sheep
  [http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/sheep/](http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/sheep/)

- Breeds of Goats
  [http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/goats/](http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/goats/)

- Current Topics and Research in the Sheep Industry
  [http://www.traill.uiuc.edu/sheepnet/](http://www.traill.uiuc.edu/sheepnet/)

- Agricultural Career Profiles
  [http://www.mycaert.com/career-profiles](http://www.mycaert.com/career-profiles)