

Tunis sheep

A Heritage breed



Heritage livestock has been bred over time providing multi-purpose animals adaptable to many conditions.

Because of their wide genetic diversity, these breeds are generally better able to withstand disease, harsh conditions, and to live on pasture than are animals that have been bred for only very specific purposes. Industrial farms today rely on only a few specialized breeds of livestock, and valuable genetic diversity is in danger of being lost forever.

At the present time in the US, 60% of all sheep are of 4 breeds, and 40% are Suffolk sheep. Within the last 15 years, at least 190 breeds of farm animals worldwide have become extinct and another 1,500 are at risk.

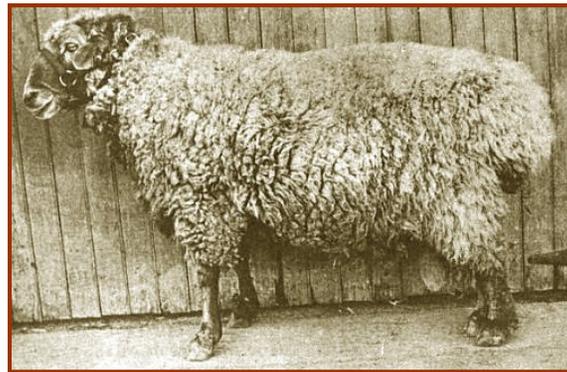
Tunis sheep now move among “Rare, “Threatened” and “Watch” lists of the Livestock Breeds Conservancy’s priority list. The National Tunis Sheep Registry currently reports approximately 1000 lamb registrations nationwide per year.

Tunis sheep

Where did they come from?

Ancestors of modern Tunis were imported to the U.S. prior to the Revolutionary War and were crossed with local sheep creating a uniquely American breed.

These striking redheads with pendulous ears and docile temperaments were included in George Washington’s flocks at Mt. Vernon and mowed the White House lawn for Thomas Jefferson who liked them better than his Merinos. The breed was nearly lost during the Civil War, but two small flocks were discovered in the South about 1890 and the breed was brought back from near-extinction.



Tunis came to Arizona in 1909 when the state agricultural experiment station near Mesa developed a champion ram named Gay Lad (**above**) “for improving the sheep of Arizona.” More than 200 lambs were born, and a cross-breed named “Phoenix” or “Early Desert” was in development when the flock was dispersed as World War I redefined the country’s wool and meat needs. *Woolhalla Tunis* was the second known flock in the state since that time, and our lambs have helped create other flocks in places as diverse as Waddell, San Tan Valley, Concho, Chino Valley, Lukachuki, as well in other Western and Intermountain states.

Tunis sheep

Physical characteristics



Striking ivory-colored wool, contrasting cinnamon-red face and legs, and expressive eyes are only the first of many pluses for the breed, proving that in the Tunis, beauty is more than skin deep.

This is a medium-sized breed; ewes are excellent mothers and have very easy and generally unassisted births. Lambs weigh 7-12 pounds at birth and twins are not uncommon. Lambs are born red or dark tan in color and gradually turn ivory or oatmeal-colored as the wool grows, although face and legs retain the cinnamon color.

At maturity, rams weigh 175-225 pounds and measure 28-30 inches at the withers; mature ewes are 25-50 pounds lighter and 2-4 inches shorter. Both rams and ewes are polled (hornless).

Under some conditions, Tunis have the ability to breed out of season producing fall lambs. Rams are noted for their libido, being quite active when young and even during hot weather.

Both rams and ewes are long-lived; ewes have been documented lamb-producers at age 14.

Tunis sheep Traits and qualities

**Tunis traits and qualities make them
easy-keeping sheep**

A Multi-Purpose Sheep

Meat ~Tunis's tender flavorful meat has been listed on the *US Ark of Taste*, a catalog of fine foods in danger of disappearing because they are not part of the modern industrial food production system. It has been said that Tunis mutton is as mild as the lamb of other breeds.

Fiber ~ favored by hand-spinners for its varied natural colors and its lustrous 24-30 micron long staple (4-6 inch) fiber. Ewes typically shear a fleece weighing 6-9 pounds; ram fleeces weigh more.



Pasture Feed ~ Grain may be added for pregnant and nursing ewes, but Tunis are efficient feeders, doing well on marginal land, or on pasture and hay. Besides being more appropriate to a sheep's digestive system than feed-lot graining, grass feeding benefits consumers by **lowering** potential calories and cholesterol-laden fat in meat, as well as **raising** Vitamins A&E and Omega-3 and CLA (the *good* fats).

Heat Tolerant ~ From its North African origins, this breed has retained the ability to be successful in desert climates when offered shade and adequate water, as you would for any other animal.

Accepted in Maricopa County 4-H clubs ~ Tunis market lambs will be judged in Division 2810: White/Speckle face. Currently, there are no breeding or fiber classes. Contact local 4-H clubs for details.



"Here's lookin' at 'ewe,' kid!"

The Farm at the End of the Road

Phone: 602-320-9713

E-mail: woolhallatunis@gmail.com

Instagram: [aztunis](https://www.instagram.com/aztunis)

aztunis.com

Steve and Sonja Pyne, owners

All photos, except the historic one of *Gay Lad*, are of **Woolhalla Tunis** sheep.

Tunis Sheep

the breed to
succeed



Woolhalla Tunis, a registered flock
from

The Farm at the End of the Road
Queen Creek, Arizona

aztunis.com