

VALLEY FIBER ARTS GUILD

WORKSHOP SERIES 2024-2025 SHEEP BREED STUDY

Breed: Leicester Longwool

The Leicester Longwool is an English conservation breed. Once the most common breed in England, now the breed is considered critically endangered with around 400 breeding ewes in the British Isles. During the 1930s - 1940s the breed was completely extinct in the US, with a mere handful of sheep remaining in Canada. In 1980s - 1990s efforts to reestablish the breed in North America included importing a foundation flock from Australia.



Picture credit: Pinterest

This breed was originally developed by an 18th century breeder in Dishley Grange, Leicestershire. The breed was introduced to Australia in 1826. Leicester Longwool sheep are currently found in Great Britain, Sweden, US, Australia, and New Zealand. The Leicester Longwool Sheep Breeders Association is dedicated to preserving this breed and offers a breed registry.

Leicester Longwool sheep are part of a larger Longwool sheep breed family. Leicester Longwool are characterized as fast growing, naturally polled (no horns), good temperament, large framed sheep. Fleeces are dense and heavy - weighing as much as 18 pounds for an adult. The fleece locks have an average staple length of 6 to 10 inches but can get up to 14 inches, many times the sheep are shorn semi-annually. The locks are crimped, lustrous, durable, and take dyes well.

The fiber diameter for US Leicester Longwool sheep is 32-38 micron. Due to the length of the locks this fiber is best prepared and spun using a worsted prep and draft, with less twist.

The fleece we are working with was sourced from a farm in Virginia, USA.



Picture credit: Leicester Longwool Sheep Breeders Association