



LET'S TALK

EAST FRIESIAN

DAIRY SHEEP

BY MIKAYLA SLOAT

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mikayla Sloat

Hello friend! I'm Mikayla Sloat, a 4th generation dairy farmer, 1st generation dairy sheep farmer. Growing up in the dairy industry taught me many invaluable lessons when it came to caring for animals. I learned quickly that the input matters just as much as the output. I watched my father spend tireless hours tending his herd of cattle, checking and re-checking calves to ensure their health was in tip top shape. Like a sponge, I soaked up the love and care my father extended to our Holstein dairy herd. I have grown and taken that love and multiplied it by becoming the very best shepherdess I can be.

I am starting from the ground up learning all I can about dairy sheep. You might think I'm crazy by jumping into a pocket of agriculture that I've never been in before; but by jumping into the dairy sheep industry, I have been blessed to provide a natural, nutrient dense form of vitamins, minerals & calcium for my dairy intolerant children and husband.

My hope in creating this free ebook for you, is that my confidence can become contagious, and you would be challenged to seek out other milk options for your own dairy intolerant family members & friends!

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INTRODUCTION

CHOOSING TO RAISE YOUR OWN FORM OF DAIRY AT HOME SHOULDN'T BE INTIMIDATING, IT SHOULD BE EXCITING!

When it comes to raising dairy sheep, especially East Friesians, there are a lot of factors to consider. Choosing not to move forward because it scares you a little is not how you can serve your family well friend. I want to encourage you that if you are feeling called to raise your own form of dairy at home, but think you're unqualified; if I can do it, you can to!

The East Friesian dairy breed can get a pretty bad rap because they tend to carry more issues compared to other dairy breeds. But! (Yes, but!) Like I mentioned earlier, I became a sponge as a child. From a very young age I learned just how important it is to make sure your production animals are in the best health to produce the best quality for your farm.

My goal is to provide you with the confidence & a free guide to start you off in the right direction when it comes to tending to your East Friesian dairy sheep.

In this ebook we will be covering the pros and cons of owning a high production dairy breed. How to source good quality East Friesians once you have established they are in fact, the dairy breed for you. Sharing tips that I've learned and I'm sure will continue to learn until the Lord calls me home. Tips on providing the best input care; hoof care, parasite prevention, & feed options to ensure the output you are placing on your table will be safe and nutritious for you and your family. Lastly, I will be sharing several of the East Friesian & general sheep questions I have received and lengthy answers for your "one stop shop" East Friesian facts and information.

It's important for me to tell you that I am exactly one year into dairy sheep. I am NOT an expert nor claim to be. But if sharing the things I have learned over the last year will help you make an informed decision about the East Friesian breed, I will gladly share with you everything I have learned! As well as the tid-bits I have picked up along the way from fellow shepherds and my dairy farmer dad!

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CHAPTER I

IS THE EAST FRIESIAN BREED RIGHT FOR YOU: THE PROS AND CONS OF OWNING A HIGH PRODUCTION DAIRY BREED.

Size and temperament of the East Friesian

The mature weight of the East Friesians can range anywhere from 150-270 pounds. Ewes average out between 160-180 pounds and mature Rams can weigh up to 225-270 pounds! Don't let the large size of this breed intimidate you into choosing a different dairy breed, though consider you may throw your back out man handling your sheep if ever needed. In my experience with dairy sheep, man handling is bound to happen at some point.

The East Friesians remind me of the Holstein cattle I was raised around. They are very easy going and are easy to make friendly as they are a breed that relies heavily on their shepherd.

The Cons of the East Friesian breed

It would be naive to think that there isn't a few downfalls with such a high production dairy breed. East Friesians are prone to a few not so fun ailments

but with the proper care and prevention, a lot of the cons in the EF breed can be avoided.

East Friesians are susceptible to hoof rot (or foot rot, but my dad has always referred to it as hoof rot, so will I) among having poor hoof health in general. I have found performing regular hoof checks and timely trimmings to be beneficial. If hooves are allowed to grow too long, they are more prone to develop hoof rot and can be harder to trim back to a maintainable size. When we bought Fraulien, she had TERRIBLE hoof health. We have slowly been working over the last year to shorten her hoof length which also helps her grip and get around better as well as keeps her hooves healthy overall!

Friesians are also known to be heavy producers, I know, you're thinking "wait, why is this a con?" But trust me friend, it's something that can quickly become a con if you are not content tending to your sheep's udder. Since EF are such high producers, they often

need to be milked soon after lambing regardless if lambs are left to nurse or not. Generally, a well producing East Friesian will still need milked out at least once a day while lamb sharing to ensure that mastitis does not develop. They are not a breed that can easily be walked away from once lambing and milking season begins. If you're a homebody like myself, this might not pose as an issue for you, but it is an important fact to know.

The wool is not typically that of high quality and can be a rougher wool. It is still possible to process, but it is not highly sought after by fiber artisans. Shearing is another con if you want a low matience dairy sheep, the EF may not be your number one pick.

East Friesians can also be prone to have poor parasite resistance and be a challenge to worm holistically. I have found so far, on a strict holistic deworming schedule we have had no more parasite issues than with our Kahtahdin hair sheep. It is more of a challenge to maintain parasites in the East Friesians, but on a strict deworming schedule it is doable.

They can also be susceptible to viral diseases, breed specific skin issues, and often may require a shepherd present during lambing. Fraulien as a first time mom lambed twins unassited and I am hoping that I can sing a similar song for the rest of our herd come 2024 lambing season. But it is important to know, that this isn't always the case and assistance is often needed during lambing.

The pros of the East Friesian breed

Now that I've given you the longest list of cons; let me boost your confidence yet again, in the East Friesian breed.

The number one pro in my opinion is the milk yield you gain from this high production breed. East Friesians have one of the longest milking seasons, lasting upwards of 8 months and some even longer! I was able in 2023 to milk Fraulien once a day, and yield on average, 1/2 gallon a day from April-September.

Another pro is that though East Friesians are large in size, they are unbelievably kind. I never worry about my children being harmed by any of our ewes. It's important to note that a ram in ANY sheep breed should never be trusted fully. You never want to turn your back on a ram. They can be unpredictable and dangerous, this goes across board in sheep and does not just apply to East Friesian rams.

Because they are so docile and loving, I never have issues preventing the list of cons. They stand easily for hoof trimmings, are easy to syringe holistic dewormer into, and often don't need to be tied for shearing (if scissor shearing).

Though the pro list is significantly shorter than the cons, I wouldn't trade my East Friesians for any other breed. They are a needy breed to shepherd, but if you're a diligent homebody that finds joy in tending your flock, they might be right for you.

CHAPTER II

WHERE ARE THEY: HOW TO SOURCE GOOD QUALITY EAST FRIESIAN SHEEP NEAR YOU.

The hardest part by far in my own personal dairy sheep journey has been sourcing the quality that I want. Not only does it require some patience, and aggressive digging to find high quality East Friesians; but you will want to make sure you are ready to put your money where your mouth is when you start saying you want East Friesian dairy sheep. There are very few breeders currently in the US and it takes a little creative digging to find them.

What Should I Look for When Searching for East Friesians

There are a few factors that you want to pay attention to when sourcing your dairy sheep. The most important thing is sourcing your sheep from a healthy tested flock. We test and add only sheep from clear tested flocks for: **Caseous Lymphadenitis (CL)**, **Q Fever**, **Johne's**, **Ovine Progressive Pneumonia (OPP)**. The lab I linked is also the lab we prefer to use when testing. Once you source a quality breeder with healthy stock the next thing to look at is udder size and conformation.

You want to pay attention to the ewes udder size and production levels of both the ram lamb and ewe lamb you are potentially adding to your flock. I personally do not care too much about teat placement, but it is something we will be breeding for in the future.

Practical Strategies for Finding Dairy Sheep Near You

- Search out shepherds and farms producing quality dairy sheep. Because there are so few right now, the internet is your best friend.
- Start by joining East Friesian dairy sheep groups on Facebook. There are several that I am apart of that provide valuable insight. This also links you with other breeders and other shepherds searching for EF.
- Make friends with the shepherds that you feel drawn to. I am close friends with where each of our sheep have come from.
- Be ready to pay for a transporter, or hook up a trailer and bring home your starter flock.

CHAPTER III

UNDERSTANDING YOUR EAST FRIESIAN SHEEP: TIPS TO ENSURE THAT YOUR INPUT IS JUST AS HEALTHY AS YOUR OUTPUT.

We have touched on the character traits of the East Friesians a little bit, but we will go into length in this section. Not only are the East Friesians docile and peaceful giants, they also have a few quirks that it is important to address in it's own section.

Understanding the Character and Nutritional Needs of Your East Friesian

East Friesians are known to either be excellent mothers, or terrible mothers. There seems to be no middle ground in this area. You either hit the jackpot when it comes to mothering, or you don't.

Since they are high producers, Friesians also require more input than certain breeds. They do not do well on a strictly grass fed diet and if this is your goal, you may want to look elsewhere. It is possible, but I personally wouldn't recommend it. They prefer more mild temperatures and do not handle the extreme heat or extreme cold well.



Tips to Ensure That Your Input is Just as Healthy as Your Output



This might seem obvious, but creating a strong bond with your flock is essential to success. Learning each Ewe and how they tick will help you be able to spot issues when they arise much quicker than if you do not take the time to learn the traits of each member of your flock.



If you want a good yield from your production Ewe you will want to ensure that you are feeding a good quality mixture of grains and alfalfa. I prefer a mixture of oats, alfalfa pellets, and a NON-GMO unsweetened sheep pellet. Feeding a sweetened feed can take a toll on dental health and that isn't something I want to mess around with.



Keeping your East Friesian in tip top shape will not be easy on your pocket book. Though, the benefits of taking meticulous care of your sheep however will reap in time. Not only will you yield high quality milk, you may also choose to spin your wool, and sell your lambs to other shepherds which will help assist with the feed cost!



Your milk yield has the potential to tell you A LOT about the health of your ewe. The correlation between feed and water intake will be evident in the amount of milk your ewe produces. Being diligent to make sure your ewe has high quality grain mixture as well as access to fresh clean water and alfalfa 24/7 is extremely important.



Make your calendar your best friend, and write down EVERYTHING. This is something I learned from sitting with my dad for hours on end in the office at the barn. His calendar looked like chicken scratch to me, but if issues arose with cows he went to his years worth of information and often found a solution to his problem.



Take the time to build friendships and connections with other shepherds. Linking yourself to a trusted source of fellow shepherds will help you long term. When times get hard and you can't rely on all of your other assets having a shepherding community is invaluable. Being sure to have an educated soundboard in your pocket will help you in more ways than I can count!

CHAPTER IV

Q&A: TALKING ALL THINGS MILK TASTE AND DAIRY SHEEP FACTS...

East Friesian Dairy Sheep

When I started sharing about our dairy sheep journey everyone thought I was crazy. Some said it out loud (like my dad!) and some didn't.

I never imagined that there would be an entire shepherding community desiring to learn as much as they could about the breed I've come to know and love!

With the spotlight on our dairy sheep lately, I have been receiving numerous messages and emails asking me in depth questions about our sheep. As much as I'd like to sit at my computer all day and answer each and every one in detail, raising four children and running a farm doesn't leave me with much time to do so. Cue, a free ebook!

The Most Common Question: How Does it Taste

It's no surprise that this is the number one question out of all the questions I've received. To our generation milking sheep seems so bizarre. To latter generations, milking sheep was just as common as every person having

a phone attached to them in 2024. Everyone seems to be concerned as to how sheep milk compares to cow or goat. Which is understandable since aside from seed oil filled nut milk, those currently are the only other raw milk options readily available. Sadly, (and not sadly?) it isn't like cow or goat milk. It's like an extra creamy sweet cows milk if I had to pick between comparing the two. There is no "goaty" or "lamb" flavor to the milk which I love personally. Sheep milk contains double the amount of butterfat in comparison to goat's and cow's milk. The fat globules in sheep milk are smaller than those in either cow or goat milk and that means the milk is more homogeneous. The smaller fat globules are more easily digested, and often people who cannot digest cow milk can digest sheep milk with no issues.

Q: Can you have just one or do they do better with friends?

A: Sheep are herd animals and do best with at minimum one other sheep. A lone sheep is never recommended. I recommend at least a flock of 3-4.

Q: Best breeds?

A: I don't personally think there is a best but rather, a best for your farm/family. Being a farmers daughter going after production came as second nature to me. EF are known to be HIGH producers and after milking goats for so many years I decided to jump to a large producer, instead of going after a breed that would produce one quart a day With a family of 6 milk doesn't last long in our home so for us the best choice was the East Friesian. Rachel over @whoopsydaisvfarm, is your research girl when it comes to knowing all the breeds. She wrote a sheep book that is super informative about each breed called:

“The Guide to Homestead Dairy Sheep” by Rachel Hester

Q: Can I have sheep in a small yard? Are they loud?

A: You can have sheep in whatever size area you have as long as they are able to move about comfortably and are supplementing feed accordingly to make up for the lack of pasture. Sheep are loud at feeding times, or at least that's the only time mine seem to call out .

Q: Why don't you dock their tails?

A: Some people do, it seems to be a personal preference thing. They don't tend to "switch" their tails like cattle so you don't seem to get flicked in the face like you commonly do with cows. My dad rarely docked tails growing up, he would only dock tails of cows that would consistently collect manure on the tips and then flick it around. It's just not something I desire to do since I don't have an issue with their "rat tail" and since there is no wool on the tail it does not pose an issue.

Q: Does the cream from sheep milk separate like cows milk, or is it more like goats milk?

A: I achieve a cream line often! Sheep milk contains double the amount of butterfat compared to cow & goat milk. So even though it is more homogeneous than cow and goat I still am able to get cream without a cream separator. I'll be documenting more on this once we lamb out in a few weeks and begin milking again. I'll start a "cream" highlight on instagram if you'd like to dig further into it.

Q: How do you get them used to the milk stand?

A: Grain is your best friend on the stand. During milking season my girls are ONLY given grain on the stand. It's helpful to give lots of chest scratches and treats on the stand. You want the milk stand to be a comfortable place for your ewes.

Q: What is the feed cost difference between sheep VS cow?

A: I can't confidently tell you how much it costs to keep a cow, but I can tell you the rough estimate we budget each year off of. We have very little pasture if any, which means we are feeding hay and grain year round. On average, five East Friesians (4 ewes & 1 ram) costs us roughly \$250-\$350 a head for a years worth of feed and supplements. This of course is not including vet care and unexpected emergencies.

Facts about sheep milk you probably didn't know:

- Sheep milk has more solids in it than cow and goat milk. In fact, up to 2 and 1/2 times as much cheese can be made from one gallon of sheep milk than from other milks.
- Sheep milk can be frozen until enough is accumulated to make cheese. This is because, unlike cow and goat milk, the smaller fat and protein particles do not separate when defrosting.
- Because the milk is filled with so much good bacteria, it needs to be either frozen or made into cheese soon after milking, because it has the potential to spoil rapidly. Ours lasts about a week in the fridge before it begins to separate. If I wait a few days, a cream line appears and I then can make butter.
- Sheep milk is loaded with more fat, protein, and vitamins, it tastes sweeter than other milks. Sheep milk is highly nutritious, richer in vitamins A, B, and E, calcium, phosphorus, potassium, and magnesium than cows milk.
- Many people (including my husband & my children!) who can't eat cow or goat milk cheese, can eat sheep milk cheese because the smaller fat globules are more easily digested. Same goes for digesting the raw milk as well!
- As a smaller woman, being able to man handle our dairy critters whenever I need and not have to wait for my husband has been very convenient.
- Sheep's milk yields 18 to 25 percent cheese, while goat's and cow's milk only yields 9 to 10 percent.

CONCLUSION

THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF SOMETHING NUTRITIOUS.

At first glance the East Friesian breed can be intimidating. They are large, yet sweet. Expensive, yet worth every cent. Sheep regardless the breed, are one of the only animals that can produce such an array of by products! You not only gain milk, but wool seasonally to be spun, and also have the option of filling your freezer at the end of the breeding season if you so desire.

Though I recommend the East Friesians to a more seasoned shepherd, I don't think you will fail if you are determined enough to be a diligent and observant shepherd. Owning sheep can teach you many life lessons and some very biblical ones as well. I will choose to shepherd sheep until the Lord calls me home, and I hope if anything, I have encouraged you to confidently move in the direction you are feeling called; wether that be raising East Friesians for your family or searching out another form of raw milk at home.



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