

'Goat-To-Shawl' Display At Farm Show

Goat-Hair Fibers Produce Top-Quality Yarns

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GLEN ROCK (York Co.) —

Sheep-to-shawl demonstrations and contests, highlighting all the processes through which wool is converted from a raw commodity into a stylish, warm fashion accessory, have become popular Farm Show events.

But how about a goat-to-shawl display? Members of the Pennsylvania Mohair and Cashmere Growers Association (PMCGA) plan such a demonstration, utilizing goat fleece fibers as part of the Farm Show's annual Sheep-To-Shawl festivities.

The warp threads of the shawl will be half mohair and half cashmere, so the finished shawl will actually be one-fourth mohair, one fourth cashmere, and one half wool," said Binnie Roig, Dalmatia, president of the PMCGA.

The mohair and cashmere producers group was founded four years ago by three producers of goat fleece fibers. Through attending the Farm Show's dairy goat show, they made initial contact with other potential members. The PMCGA numbers more than 20.

"Our purpose is to promote the fiber goats," said Binnie Roig.

Through participation in the sheep-to-shawl event, along with their display and demonstrations in the Family Living area of the Farm Show on Monday and Tuesday, PMCGA members look forward to further educating visitors about mohair and cashmere. They also hope to stimulate increased interest in the use of these strong, soft, and warm natural fibers.

While mohair and cashmere are

both products of goats, the fibers are handled in very different ways. Mohair is the fleece of Angora goats, a natural fiber that is long and wavy with a rich, lustrous shine. It is obtained by regular shearing of the Angora goat's fleece, just as sheep are sheared to harvest their wool.

Cashmere, in contrast, is the soft, downy undercoating of a goat's fleece. It can be produced by many different breeds of goats. Certain breeds or strains of goats are more likely to produce the longer, crimped undercoat, with at least three-fourths-inch long hairs that qualifies as cashmere. Cashmere goat fiber production can be enhanced by crossing bloodlines with a good quality, long and undercoat growth.

Goats grow the cashmere through the summer and fall months as an insulating layer against the cold of winter. Cashmere fiber is "harvested" by combing it from the goat in early spring, when the natural shedding process loosens it from the skin. It can also be obtained by shearing the fleece. Shorn fleeces, however, are usually less valuable, since they tend to be contaminated with the longer, coarse outer hair, known in the trade as "guard hair." Guard hair can be used for more coarse wool purposes, such as rug making, but does not command the higher price of the finer, soft undercoat.

What is known as Angora wool does not come from goats at all, but from Angora rabbits. So, while Angora rabbits produce Angora wool, Angora goats produce mohair. Sources of these natural



Greta Dize gets an affectionate nuzzle from Splash, a favorite pet from the family's fiber-producing goat herd.

fibers is thus often confusing for the average consumer.

"At the Farm Show, we will be presenting talks and spinning demonstrations, displaying completed garments and plan to have both raw and ready-to-spin fibers available for sale," said Greta Dize, vice president of the PMCGA. "There will also be both Angora and Cashmere goats on display."

Greta, her husband Bob, and their family raise about 20 Angora and cashmere goats at their Glen Rock farm. An avid wool enthusiast, Greta has raised sheep for many years, with a special emphasis on the natural-colored breeds. She became interested in the goats as an alternative fiber to use in her spinning and knitting projects.

"I was buying mohair to blend with sheep wool and decided to look into buying a few Angora goats," Greta said. "I came home with six does and a couple of bucks."

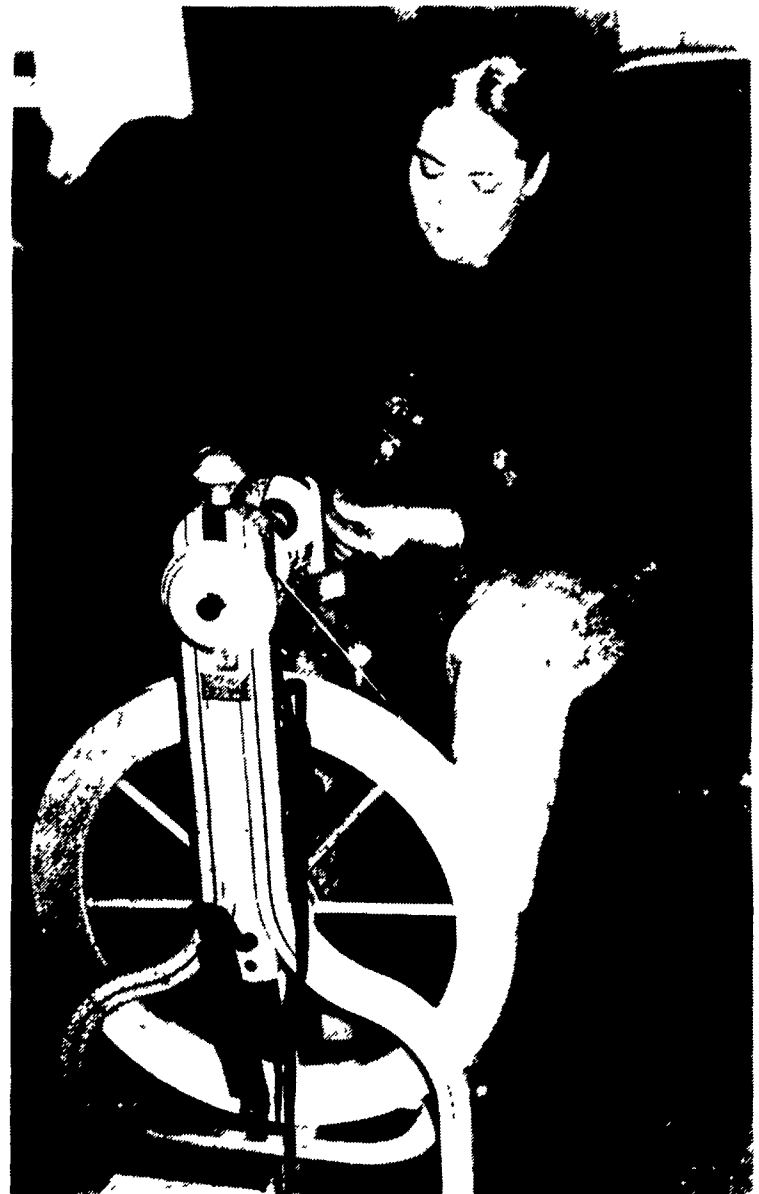
"It probably would have been cheaper to just buy the fleeces," she adds with a grin, relating how the goat herd has expanded.

This year, she introduced dark-colored genetics into her Angora herd by crossing selected does to a black buck. Dark-colored kids resulting from the crosses cannot be registered, however. Only all-white Angora goats meet pedigree requirements.

Whether registered or not, Angora goats have a gentle temperament, according to those who tend and breed these four-footed alternative fiber sources.

"They're sort of between a sheep and a dairy goat in personality, but are more personable than sheep," said Leslie Orndorff, Brodbeck's, who shares Greta Dize's goals of generating public interest and demand for mohair and cashmere. "Angora goats don't have as offensive an odor as do some of the breeds and they aren't 'escape artists' like dairy goats."

Leslie's job on a farm where Angora goats were included in the livestock variety raised there led her to "fall in love" with the gentle breed. She and her husband Ron already kept a few sheep on their 13-acre farm near Glenville, so adding her first Angora goats five years ago was an easy venture to try. The couple now has a flock of



Mohair fiber from her Angora goats is spun into yarn by Greta Dize.

25 registered breeding animals, along with a small flock of wethers she keeps for their fiber production.

"Goats are browsers and sheep are grazers, so they work well together," says Leslie.

Because Angora goats do like to browse on what might often be considered weeds or pest plants, their appetites make them useful for clearing old pastures or brushy undergrowth. That same tendency, however, causes their long fleeces to pick up and retain bits of leaves, twigs, weeds and grasses that contaminate the fleece.

"With mohair, you have to wash it and wash it and wash it more to get the fleece clean," said Leslie.

Marketing their mohair production is a challenge Greta,

Leslie and other members of the fledgling fiber producers association are tackling, both as a group and in their own individual pursuits. Since most of the members' flocks are small, amounts of fiber generated at a shearing are not enough to justify the time and costs of hauling it to a wool pool.

Thus, their involvement in creative marketing on their own is of necessity.

Several PMCGA members have found that sheep and wool festivals in the region are useful for helping to generate increased interest and demand for their production. Hand spinners, knitters, and weavers often attend such festivals in search of special fleeces or yarns not readily available through mass retail marketing

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Homestead Notes



Leslie Orndorff is using yarn of pure cashmere to knit a christening gown for her infant son.