Before getting into the sheep business-ask yourself these questions:

1. Do I like sheep?
2. Do I have facilities and time to dedicate to having sheep?
3. Will I have an adequate feed supply?
4. What is my goal with my operation?

If one is beginning a sheep enterprise, that individual should learn as much as possible about the business ahead of the time, so that correct timely management decisions can be made.

Further information:
- Fast Facts about Sheep Production
- Sheep Care Guide
- Facts about American Lamb
- Facts about Sheep Ecology in America

Facilities

Because sheep are adaptable and their wool is a good insulator, adult sheep do not require extravagant housing. Sheep take advantage of surrounding terrain, such as hills, ridges, trees, and shrubs for shelter. Barns or sheds should have adequate ventilation and clean, dry surroundings to reduce bacterial and viral buildup and increase animal comfort. Fencing for sheep should serve the dual purpose of keeping the sheep in and keeping predators out.

Further information:
- Facts about Predator Losses

Feed and Nutrition

Sheep can obtain the majority of their nutrients from grass and forages in a pasture. Nutrition is essential to maintaining a thriving flock. Good nutrition means greater wool and milk production, higher fertility, and faster growth. Pasture and hay should be the primary component of a sheep's diet, with vitamin and mineral supplements as needed. Grain may need to be added in situations when the diet needs some extra help such as pregnant ewes, finishing market lambs or low forage options.
Identification

Some system of animal identification is necessary for producers to efficiently monitor various aspects of their flock breeding and management programs. Likewise, it is important for producers to be able to keep medical records. A system of medication/treatment records must be maintained that, at a minimum, identifies the animal(s) treated (individual animals, pens, lots, etc.), the date(s) of treatment, the drug(s) administered, serial and lot number of product, who administered the drug(s), the amount administered, and the withdrawal time prior to harvest. A number of systems for on farm use, usually ear tags and paint brands, have been used for animal identification for many years.

Parasite Control

Internal parasites are a major health concern for many flocks, especially in areas that receive significant rainfall. The life cycle of the most serious of these parasites involves the presence of infectious larvae on the forages sheep graze, in addition to the presence of adult parasites in the animals. Therefore, strategies that interrupt the life cycle in ways that reduce pasture contamination are most successful. De-wormers are usually most effective when used in combination with pasture management strategies. Shepherds should work with their veterinarian to develop a parasite-management program.

Sheering

Wool is a naturally produced, high-quality fiber with many uses. Because sheep do not shed their wool naturally, shearing is usually necessary for wool removal and for the physical well-being of the animal during certain times of the year. Some breeds of sheep grow hair instead of wool and shed it naturally without shearing.

Useful Links

- Breeds of Sheep
- American Sheep Industry Association
- Scrapie
- Dermatophilosis in Sheep and Goats
- Farm Ewe Flocks--Once-a-Year Lambing