

From This Little Lamb

By Margaret Vincent

What do Jello, shampoo, surgical sutures and cellophane wrap have in common? These products all owe a part of their existence to sheep. Contrary to what is most often marketed from sheep---- the wool and meat, sheep have so much more to offer to other products. For hundreds of years, sheep have been supplying the materials necessary to create daily products. It seems that in the more recent years, we have been slowly losing sight of just how much sheep really do supply us with. If you go on to the internet and type in sheep by-products, you can come with almost 487 000 web sites that reference well over 200 products that have a little bit of ewe or ram in them. With numbers this great, the contribution sheep make is nothing to scoff at. The range of products goes from sports, personal hygiene, clothing, housing, food, and make-up, to chemical products.

For instance in medicine, sheep are a source of vital life saving drugs, along with other medical equipment. When the surgical sutures used are made from sheep intestines, they are more readily absorbed, as well as lowering the risk of a body rejecting the sutures. Various every day health equipment products can contain sheep materials in them, such as syringes, or bandages.

Play ball! For years the wool and hide from sheep have been a large component of sports equipment, from baseball, soccer, and hockey to football. The modern games use the hide for outside the balls, inside skates or sometimes for the boots worn. In the past, most protective equipment was made from leather, on occasion bones were used in the leather as shields. As long as there have been sports throughout the world, sheep and other animal's parts have been used for equipment in the games. Even tennis would be hard if sheep were subtracted, there would be no ball and no strings in the rackets.

Each day the environment is taking a more predominant stance in the news, and how to conserve. Sheep are helping houses and other buildings go "green". Some places have gone to using the wool to make insulation, a natural source that lasts, and can be plentiful. As for flower beds, lawns and fields there is always the manure to fertilize the land, naturally. By using the fats and/or the fatty acids found in sheep many household cleaning products like detergents or floor or furniture wax are now safer as well as bio-degradable. By using these products from sheep the environment is safer, while homes still get and stay clean. To further support the movement are the paints, wallpapers, and pastes that contain the natural materials being used to create healthier atmospheres.

When outfitting a home, there may be furniture chosen that includes leather or wool to the upholstery. Along with this are the decorative pieces to make a house a home, like candles, artwork, along with wool blankets. Who doesn't enjoy being wrapped in a warm wool blanket, with a sheep skin at their feet on a cold winter's night? Washable sheepskins are a must for those with delicate skin or bedridden.

Sheep have been an inspiration to artists throughout the world, be it using paint and a canvas or the bones, the wool, or clay, to convey a message to the general population.

Other art supplies from sheep could be; paint brushes, ceramics, bone charcoal pencils, paints, crayons, and glue.

Part of the time this art is conveyed using simple things like buttons, clothing or jewellery. The wool from sheep is not always just the yarn in a knit sweater, it can also be combined with other materials to create a more durable product or softer, or longer lasting. Intricate jewellery and buttons can be formed using the bones, hooves or teeth from sheep. Every year there is a competition for young women to create entire outfits from wool, so it is not impossible to see that there is a significant chance that some of your own clothes may contain some. In many countries throughout the world, it is still a common practice to use a spinning wheel to make the yarn or thread, then use a loom to weave blankets, mats, or rugs.

Milk doesn't always moo, it can BAA too. In Canada the quantity of milking sheep flocks is increasing, making it more common to see sheep's milk cheese and ice cream available. With the increasing popularity of sheep milk, meat is no longer the only publicised edible product available. The demand for the sheep milk products is on the rise as ethnic communities throughout world request it. The main ingredient, gelatin, in jello and other yummy desserts, is found in none other than the fat of sheep. If it were not for sheep we would be minus some delicious desserts, even marshmallows owe part of their existence to sheep.

Not only is our food enhanced because of sheep, but so are our personal hygiene and appearances. Almost everything from soap, shampoo, conditioner, body creams, and make-up could contain extract from sheep fat or fatty acids.

The bodies of sheep can provide many chemicals and oils for commercial or industrial use. The oils, lubricants, and anti-freeze can be used in machinery or vehicles to keep an optimal operating performance. Even certain pesticides, herbicides, and insecticides contain products from sheep. The tires on your truck or car may have some sheep oil in the rubber. Chemical solvents or abrasives have been known to utilize the items available from sheep as well as even steel ball bearings.

Thinking of all the ways that sheep are present in every day life now, there are even more though, pet food, treats, and chicken feed also make use of fatty acids. There are hundreds of uses from essentially the entire animal, but these uses can vary greatly from explosives, adhesive tape, chewing gum, luggage, all the way to phonograph records.

These animals; feed us, keep us warm, help us clean up ourselves and our surroundings, help us look pretty and different, help protect us, and give us lifesaving materials. Sheep are more than just meat and wool, they are part of what makes our lives easier and safer every day.