

Counting Sheep



The early settlers of Vermont raised sheep for their wool which they spun into yarn and wove into cloth. By the early 1800s the price a farmer could get for wool rose. Farmers who had originally raised sheep just for their families' needs began raising them to sell wool. Sheep farming became the number one source of income for many Vermonters. Farmers were so enthusiastic about sheep farming that by 1840 there were over one and a half million sheep in the state, about five sheep to every man, woman, and child. In no time, mills for processing the wool began to spring up.

Competition from western sheep ranchers and lower wool prices soon forced most Vermont farmers to switch to raising cows and other crops. A few farmers began to specialize in raising pure-bred Merino sheep for shepherds around the world.