

Versatile wool can beat the heat and keep you cool

October 27 2015, by Steve Byrns

Relax! Wool is supposed to be hot and itchy, right? Not according to a study conducted at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension Center at San Angelo.

Monica Ebert, newly named [wool](#) lab manager-research associate at Montana State University at Bozeman and recent graduate student at Angelo State University, has been completing graduate work with Texas A&M University and the Bill Sims Wool and Mohair Research Lab located on the center's grounds.

"The focus of my research work has been wool product development with an emphasis on activewear apparel," said the Kansas native.

Activewear to most folks in Texas means light comfortable clothing for sports, exercise and outdoor activities during hot weather, just the opposite image of what most people picture wool clothing to be, Ebert said.

"Activewear is a new and emerging market that wool is entering," she said. "Typically, you wouldn't think of workout clothes as being made out of wool, but in fact, the fiber qualities of wool are exactly what you want. They work with your body to wick moisture away to keep you cool while you are working out and just overall keep you more comfortable when the proper wool is used."

"The proper wool," Ebert explained, is the key. All the individual fiber

diameters must measure less than 20 microns, with 18-19 microns even better. In the U.S., most of that top- quality wool is shorn from Rambouillet sheep.

"Thirty micron wool is itchy," she said. "They are coarser wools that really should be used in carpet, not garments. With the rise of synthetics, we've really seen our industry straighten up in the type of wool being put into apparel products. It's that high-quality wool you want next to your skin.

"My research is to help ensure the industry is getting the right wool put into the right garments so consumers are happy with their apparel. Aside from the comfort factor, the proper wool results in a very lightweight garment which is perfect for summer and winter too. Wool is perfect for keeping you cool in the summertime and warm in the winter."

As a luxury fiber, Ebert said top-quality wool garments are expensive, but they will last a very long time and offer excellent durability when compared to practically any other fiber. The trick though is to buy items that don't soon go out of style, she said.

"Many things go in and out of fashion," she said. "There are trends; you see clothes coming off of the fashion runways in the spring and fall. So many companies are having mid-season collections that you almost expect your favorite stores in the mall to have new clothes every month. So trends are constantly changing.

"The nice thing about wool though is that when you spend that much money on apparel you typically want it to last a long time, so you want to buy more classic timeless pieces. Pick a style which won't necessarily go out of style."

Even though Ebert's work was conducted in the heart of the sheep

country, she said you'd be hard-pressed to find any wool sportswear at your local sporting goods store.

"Many people believe wool is only for colder climates, so stores here aren't wanting to stock that high-end apparel for fear of having to mark it down if it doesn't sell. So to find it, I go online.

"When you buy online, it's easy; you don't even have to drive to town. And it's convenient, especially when you can turn around and ship an item back for free if there's an issue.

"Buying online also makes it easier for me to look at the garment's fiber content. To shop, I type 'wool' in as a search term and look up what wool products a particular retailer has to offer and choose from them."

But with Ebert's research focused on athletic attire made in the U.S., she wants consumers to think about soft, supple running shorts and T-shirts, items even a seasoned wool garment shopper might not know existed.

"We had garments made and fabric tests done, and everything we thought about wool, its breathability, durability; all of our fabric and garment tests came back to prove it had all that and more," she said. "The garments also have excellent insulation values while still being permeable, meaning they're breathable, exactly what you would want in activewear apparel. Oh, and there wasn't a scratchy thread in the entire lot."

Provided by Texas A&M University

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