Swiss Grading FAQ

What is Swiss grading?
Swiss grading is the official point-based evaluation system used to assess Valais Blacknose sheep against the original Swiss breed standard. It measures how closely an individual animal conforms to that standard at its specific stage of development.

How is a sheep graded?
Each sheep receives three numerical scores, one in each category: Appearance, Conformation, and Wool. Certified graders evaluate each category independently using the Swiss standard.

Do scores depend on age?
Yes. Swiss grading is age-adjusted, meaning the maximum possible score increases as the animal matures:
4–12 months: maximum 4 / 4 / 4
12–24 months: maximum 5 / 5 / 5
24–36 months: maximum 6 / 6 / 6

How are points assigned?
Graders begin at the maximum score for the animal's age class and deduct points for deviations from the Swiss breed standard. Each point represents a meaningful difference in structure, wool, or breed character.

What does "minus one" mean?
A minus one animal is just one point below the maximum possible total for its age class. These animals are considered elite quality because Swiss grading is intentionally strict and conservative.

How rare are minus one and maximum-point animals in the U.S.?
They are exceptionally rare. The U.S. Valais Blacknose population is still developing compared to Switzerland, where the breed has been refined over generations. Both minus one and true maximum-point animals represent significant milestones in American breeding programs.

Does a lower score mean a sheep is poor quality?
No. Swiss grading is not inflated. Many strong, productive, and valuable animals score slightly below the maximum while still contributing positively to breeding programs. Small numerical differences matter in this system and should be interpreted within the context of breed development in the United States.