Exports Offset Low U.S. Lamb Supply

During the general session of the U.S. Meat Export Federation's Strategic Planning Conference held Nov. 4, U.S. lamb exports took center stage as Gary Pfeiffer, executive vice president of sales and marketing for Davis, Calif.-based Superior Farms, provided attendees with a U.S. lamb industry update.

Although the U.S. sheep flock is small, lamb exports are a bright spot for the industry and are helping provide healthy returns to producers, Pfeiffer noted. Through August of this year, U.S. lamb exports have climbed 72 percent ahead of last year's pace in terms of volume (28.4 million lbs.) and 42 percent higher in value ($21.2 million). With four months of results still to come, exports are on pace to easily break the annual export volume record of 30.7 million lbs. and the export value record of $27.8 million, which were both established in 2006.

"The annual harvest is only 2.5 million head, which is an incredible growth in the value of lamb" he said. "It's averaging about $300 per head. For a 75 lb. lamb, that works out to about $4 per lb. in hanging weight so that's a good return to the producer.

"What we're seeing worldwide is that market being very strong in the future as the demand for lamb and all protein continues to be very strong," he added. "We're certainly hoping these record returns are leading to flock rebuilding because we can use every lamb that is produced."

Even though lamb supplies are small, the export markets represent a very critical opportunity, Pfeiffer said.

"In the United States, 50 percent of the lamb consumed is imported from Australia and New Zealand," he added. "So, if we are only half of the U.S. supply and don't have enough meat to supply our own needs, why export? Certainly, there are some great reasons why we want to export."

"We see an opportunity to maximize the returns on our premium products; rack of lamb should be on the top menus anywhere in the world," he continued. "We can capture greater returns on legs and shoulders in markets previously exclusive in using Australian and New Zealand product and certainly improve returns on variety meats. Americans don't eat very many lamb kidneys or offals, but around the world, they're a bright item.

"A lot of our heads and offals go to Mexico plus shoulders, when the price is right. The Caribbean is a great market for us. Canada is a market that has been dominated by the New Zealand market for years, and they have taken it for granted. So, I'm pleased to say we have been able to capture some significant retail market share there this year. Central and South American and then China/Hong Kong represent a small export business today but certainly are incredible opportunities going forward," he concluded.

ASI Supports Checkoff Programs

In a letter to U.S. Senate, U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the American Sheep Industry Association, along with 19 other national agriculture organizations, stated their support for the various state and federally authorized research and promotion programs, commonly known as checkoffs, in which members participate.

Recent distorted media attacks and ill-conceived legislative proposals ignore how these programs are established and approved in referenda by producers who fund the programs with their own money. With oversight provided by USDA, producers have taken it upon themselves to fund over $905 million of research, promotion and consumer education programs annually through checkoff activities at no cost to the federal government. In these austere budgetary times, our producers should be commended and certainly deserve the support of the authorizing committees and USDA.

Research Shows Guard Dogs Relax Sheep

Sheep tend to travel greater distances in the presence of a guard dog, likely because they're less concerned about predators, according to new research led by Idaho State University (ISU).

Bryson Webber, a graduate student in ISU's Geographic Information Science department who analyzed the data, said the study affirms the importance of guard dogs because stressed sheep tend to gain less weight. Previous sheep dog studies have focused on mortality linked to predation; Webber is unaware of any other studies done about how dogs affect sheep behavior.

"We don't always have to remove predators," Webber said. "With this, hopefully we can show that the lifestyle improves with the guardian dogs being present. That equates to larger income for the ranchers."

The data was collected during a 16-day period in the spring of 2010. Oregon State University supplied global positioning system collars to record the elevation, location and velocity of the sheep every second. Webber plotted the data with mapping software to depict movement. Students with the ISU GIS club volunteered to observe the behavior of the sheep.

The U.S. Sheep Experiment Station in Dubois, Idaho, provided the livestock and the four expansive pastures utilized for the study.

The study tracked herds of sheep accustomed to predators. Half of the sheep were left alone and half were guarded. The guarded flocks were switched, and the process was repeated. Though the guarded flocks were more at ease to travel farther, Webber noticed no difference in speed.

"The trend seems to be to move toward (guard dogs) now, especially as people are moving up against wolves that are moving in," Weber said.

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For Best Value, Separate Like Wool

The severe drought in Texas this year caused a shift in sheep production. Many producers throughout the country stepped up to help the Texas sheep producers by working out pasture leases, flock leases and even purchase agreements to keep Texas genetics in production.

Traditionally, Texas sheep are known to have a finer micron wool than sheep from some other regions and that fine wool is in demand. Therefore, with this year’s record wool prices, it could increase the value of the wool clip for producers who bought or are managing these flocks if they handle this wool differently than their traditional clip. It should be noted that the micron of a specific animal may vary due to changes in nutrition and management. Wool, which are marketed for best value, will benefit from being objectively measured. The companies that traditionally buy the Texas-type wools from specific customers will want to continue to gather these wools even though they are no longer calling the Lone Star State home.

If possible, the sheep should be kept separate from those with a courser micron count, as well as from those sheep with black fiber or hair.

However, even if they are run with different quality wool sheep, it is important that the finer wooled sheep be separated and shear first, before all others, to avoid contamination from subsequent rounds of shearing. Since there is a significant price difference between 19.5 wool and 20.5 or 21.5 wools, producers can maximize their profits by separating these wools.

Overall, with proper preparation and a few extra precautions, producers should be able to see the potential of the Texas fine wools, if they came from quality sheep with strong wool genetics. The strong wool market should give all producers incentive to plan ahead to produce the highest quality wool clip possible.

FDA Issues Final Rule on Cephalosporin Drugs

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) plans to restrict a family of antibiotics commonly used to treat livestock, citing concerns that overuse might promote the development of drug-resistant bacteria that can infect people.

In today’s Federal Register, the FDA said it would limit the use of cephalosporin in cattle, swine, chicken and turkey. The antibiotics can no longer be used to prevent diseases in livestock starting April 5, though they can still be used to treat illnesses, the FDA said.

A proposed order was published in 2008 prohibiting the extra-label use of cephalosporin drugs in food-producing animals, citing cephalosporin resistance in human medicine as risk to public health.

The American Sheep Industry Association (ASI) registered comments in 2008 on this order stating, “We believe that the extra-label use of the cephalosporin class of products in sheep would have a diminutive effect on any antimicrobial resistance in humans. We also believe that allowing the extra-label use of cephalosporins in sheep will reduce the pain, suffering and mortality in sheep from disease conditions for which there are no other available effective products.”

In its Final Rule, the FDA agreed with ASI and several others who commented similarly by stating, “When considering the foodborne pathway, the potential for human exposure to antimicrobial-resistant pathogens is significantly less for food derived from minor species than it is for food derived from the food-producing major species. In addition, cephalosporins are approved for use in sheep and goats, thereby, reducing the potential for extra label use in these species.”

As stated in ASI’s 2008 comments, “Naxcel (ceftiofur sodium), for example, has a very limited label approval for the treatment of respiratory disease by intramuscular injection only in sheep. A prohibition on this drug would leave the U.S. sheep industry with nearly no tools to treat gram-negative bacterial infections.”

According to ASI President Margaret Soulen Hinson, “The U.S. sheep industry believes in and practices the judicious and responsible use of the few antimicrobial drugs available to us for the treatment of sheep diseases and we appreciate FDA’s revisions to the final rule on this matter.”

Give the Gift of Sheep

The American Sheep Industry Association’s (ASI) 2012 calendar highlights 12 of the many entries ASI received in its photo contest this year. You had a chance to see the winners in the October issue of the Sheep Industry News, and now you can view a few more of these fine photographs each month throughout the entire year.

While supplies last, you can order an ASI sheep calendar for just $5 by calling 303-771-3500 or by going to www.sheepusa.org and clicking on the order materials link.

Free Sheep Advertising

RuralAds.com is the largest sheep producer emailing in the nations sending mailings out each month to over 7,000 sheep producers nationwide. Free ads are sent to other sheep producers in your specific state and may include up to four photos for three months. For an additional $10 the ad will be placed in the national emailing. Log onto www.ruralads.com to view the listing.

MSP District Map