

Sheep and Goat Newsletter – November 2012
From the Extension Learning Farm, Canton, NY

By Betsy Hodge

It's the very end of October and the sheep are still out on the pasture. In past years we have been in the transition to stored feeds during October and it has been hard on our fall lambing ewes. They would rather pick at the tiny blades of grass than eat the hay and their lambs suffered for it. Now they are not only getting nice green grass but also sections of a turnip/beet/rape plot that Brent planted earlier in the summer. After our animals were pulled off the pasture for lack of grass earlier in the season, we took all the sheep, the ewe lambs from spring that we are keeping, and the fall born lambs, to the other farm. They are grazing a section of hayfield that Charlie took second cut off of earlier in the fall.

There isn't tons of grass out there but there is fresh feed and they are happy so I am guessing they are getting enough to satisfy themselves. They get a big section of grass and a short section of the turnips. They immediately go to the turnips and eat most of the greens. They pull some of the turnips as they eat the greens and gradually eat them. They also eat the beets and turnips in the ground by scraping away at them with their bottom teeth leaving little cups of turnip still in the ground. Some grass is eaten in between. When they are done with the turnip area it is bare ground!

The turnip/beets/rape provide more energy for the animals at this time of year. We also have two steers in the paddock with the sheep and lambs. They are supposed to be getting the higher energy feeds and guarding the sheep. After jumping out 3 or 4 times, making Charlie and I have visions of steak, they have settled down and are grazing. Not sure they are actually guarding the sheep like the old cows do but we are hoping they are. Our guard dog Bear is out of commission at the moment.

We – meaning all of us shepherds – are very dependent on our guardian animals. So often they just look like big dopey dog food eating machines. However, if you listen up at night you will hear them working hard. One night I even heard my dog at home fighting with something. The next morning she had all the feeder lambs lying in a group with her by their side sitting like the sphinx watching out over the pasture and the two llamas pacing back and forth down on the tree line. I have no idea what she fought with but she was fierce and knew what to do. Many people have commented on the heavy coyote pressure this fall. There have been large cat sightings as well. Bringing your animals up to the barnyard at night can help but not always as we have had coyote kills during the day occasionally. Keep an eye on your animals!

The Wool Pool went very well October 13th. Thank you to everyone that helped out. We took in 8414 pounds of wool and pretty much filled the tractor trailer. Shi Kreig took notes, Sandy vonAllmen kept us organized and Charlie ran the tractor to load the truck. Everyone else pitched in moving bags to the scale and out for the tractor. We also all went out to lunch and had a great sheep conference afterwards. Checks will probably be coming in the spring as the wool is sorted fleece by fleece and then checks sent out. Maybe we should go there for a sheep tour one of these days. Eric, the contact at Canadian Wool Growers recently came back from a trip to China. He said he would be willing to talk about the world wool market for one of our meetings someday.

We have a Sheep Week planned for the last week of November. We will be in Watertown on Tuesday the 27th, Canton Extension Learning Farm on the 28th and Plattsburgh on the 29th. I will cover some feed inventory basics and talk about sources of feed if you need it. A veterinarian, (Carolyn Pierce, DVM, in Canton) will be present to talk about flock health over the winter and to answer questions. The meeting

will start at 7:00 in Canton. Check with your local Extension office to be sure of the time there. There will be a \$5.00 charge to cover materials and refreshments. Hope to see you there!

The NNY Livestock Team and Soil and Water are working on a pasture meeting for the end of February. We have some ideas and gathered some more at the Sheep and Goat Symposium at Cornell. However, if you have specific topics you would like to see, please let us know. Some things we are thinking of are fencing, prescribed grazing/land clearing, the turnips/beets/rape demo, sorghum/sudan demo, nitrogen application trial results, controlling invasive species in the pasture and more. We are thinking of having one big meeting in a central location with a nice meal. The cost may be a little more but we would like to be able to bring in a good speaker or two. We are thinking of running a dairy and a livestock track as well. Any input would be appreciated (bmf9@cornell.edu)

I just returned from teaching and learning at the Cornell Sheep and Goat Symposium. What a great place to network and meet people. There was plenty of enthusiasm to go around! Tatiana Stanton did a great job planning and setting up the conference. Dr. Mary Smith, the vet at Cornell was around both days and must have answered a million questions in her direct and clear way. Here are some of the highlights:

Dave Galton, a dairy professor at Cornell, talked about his sheep operation. He includes a meat sheep farm and now a milking flock. He did a great job describing how the business works and what his goals were. We definitely need to invite him up for a visit and go there for a tour!

Steve Hart, from Oklahoma, talked about the latest in parasite information. There are some possible new dewormers coming along. He also talked about a fungus that eats the nematodes (worms) that works great but has to be fed every day. There is work on a slow release way to dose the sheep but it is not ready yet. There is also a vaccine that works great but involves getting the stomachs of lots of teeny tiny worms and making the vaccine. A method to make the vaccine in vitro has not been found – yet. Work continues on tannin producing forages like chicory and birdsfoot trefoil. We need to find out what the dose is and whether small amounts in the pasture mix are helpful or not. Copper Oxide particles are promising but great care needs to be used with sheep because copper can be toxic to sheep. There are studies underway that will help us find answers for copper wire particle use. Some are even taking place in NY State. For the time being, genetic selection and pasture management are our best tools to control parasites. A great website to check out is at www.sheepandgoat.com/ACSRCC/#.

Steve Hart also showed us the Langston Feed Calculator for doing goat rations – both meat and dairy. You can take a look at it at www.luresext.edu/goats and click on “nutrient calculators” then look for “Producer Version” in the middle of the page. Then you can pretty much fill in the blanks and drop down menus to come up with a goat ration. I would be happy to help any of you that want to sit down and learn how to use this calculator.

I recently marketed lambs from my home farm to three different places. I thought it would be interesting to compare the different methods and the costs and practicality of them. I sent some to New Holland, some with the new cooperative and some to the butcher for freezer customer. Here are the results...

New Holland –

90 lbs x \$1.37 = \$123.30

Shrink was a little over 13% so \$123.30 - \$16.27 = \$107.02

Trucking = \$10.00 and Commission = \$5.00 and Yardage was \$1.00

$\$107.02 - \$16.00 = \mathbf{\$91.02 \text{ per head Net (equivalent to \$1.01 per pound)}}$

Simplest – truck picks them up and takes them and you get a check

Cooperative

90 lbs x \$1.50 = \$135 Gross

Three dollars to truck them to the gathering site $\$135.00 - \$3.00 = \$132.00$

Percentage for Marketing (estimate) $\$132.00 - \$4.05 = \mathbf{\$127.95 \text{ per head Net (\$1.42 per pound)}}$

Easy but requires weighing your lambs and sorting them and organizing the dates and trucking

There will be a fee to join the co-op and probably a bigger commission so take this estimate with a grain of salt.

Freezer Lambs

90 lbs x \$150.00 = **\$135.00 Gross and Net (\$1.50 per pound)**

Processing charges were passed on to the buyer.

Did not subtract for time, trucking the lambs or picking up the meat or storing it in a freezer before pick-up. Received more cash but it took more time and many phone calls.

The comparison is not perfect but can give you some idea of the difference between different marketing methods. That 13% shrink to New Holland really hurts. Even with the same price, \$1.50 per pound, you only come out with \$101.45 for a net or the equivalent of \$1.13 a pound. There are many factors to consider including timing. We sent lambs for a holiday and there were over 5000 lambs at the sale which depressed prices. The week before the prices were in the \$1.70-\$1.80 range for the same lambs. At those prices the New Holland net would have been about \$121.02 (\$1.34 per pound). Scheduling and how much time you have to devote to marketing play a big role in your choice of markets, too. If you have another job, direct marketing can be out of the question. Even if you do have time to direct market freezer lambs or go to the farmers markets you may need to evaluate whether your time could better be spent doing something else to cut costs. It is hard to put a price on your time, gas and electricity!