

# NNY Sheep & Goat Newsletter – March 2009

From the Cornell Cooperative Extension of St. Lawrence County Learning Farm,  
Canton, NY

By Small Livestock Educator Betsy Hodge

Hi Folks,

It is that changeable time of year when you can't wait for the thaw but you are dreading the mud. Maple sugaring is a good distraction from the weather and we will be making syrup at the Extension Farm this year. Stop in on one of the two Maple Weekends March 21-22 or March 28-29 (check [www.nnyagdev.org](http://www.nnyagdev.org) and [www.nysmaple.com](http://www.nysmaple.com) for a maple operation to visit in your area). There won't be any lambs born yet but they will be coming along in April.

It is a relatively quiet time for the sheep with not much going on. They are still eating round bale hay in the barnyard. When we get a warm afternoon they get spring-y and playful. In anticipation of lambing on pasture we have beefed up the guardian dog staff to two. We still have Bear, our Great Pyrenees, and we have added Wanda, a half Spanish Mastiff/half Maremma rescue from Ohio. Both dogs have been busy at night. When we have an evening meeting at the farm we can hear them barking out back. A special thanks to fellow shepherd Mary Tucker who stopped in Ohio "on her way" back from North Carolina to pick up the dog for us. I met Mary in southern NY and brought Wanda the rest of the way.

We are feeding a mineral mix with added Vitamin E, which is supposed to improve lamb viability. It doesn't take much (.21 lbs of Vitamin E pre-mix per 50 pound bag of minerals). We don't have much trouble with our lambs but it can't hurt and maybe it helps with the selenium challenge. We are feeding hay from a few years ago. It is good quality but probably low in some of the vitamins like A, D and E that degrade over time. One other thing, if you want a ram from this spring's lambing to use for breeding next fall, please let me know.

The home sheep are looking rather pregnant. Maybe they just show it more because they have hair instead of wool but I am guessing I will have lots of twins and triplets. It is possible that their body condition is up a little, too, as the hay I'm feeding is very good quality. I'm actually limiting the amount they are getting and they seem to be thriving with no supplements except minerals. Even the goats are looking chunky which is unusual after a cold winter.

While I was picking up the guard dog, I was delayed a day due to transport problems on the other end and took advantage of the time to visit Matt and DJ Kyle's 2,200 ewe flock in the Geneseo/Avon area south of Rochester. They hope to go to 5,000 ewes someday. The ewes with lambs are in two barns that look like your basic sheep barns (were originally used for something else). They creep feed the lambs and wean at about 60 days. They lamb February and September/October.

Lambs are sold to local buyers that come from the city and buy groups of lambs. We visited very large square pastures with 400 to 700 ewes out in them grazing what is left from last year. Some of the pastures are leftover heifer pasture and some are only for sheep. The area they live in is part of the Genesee Valley Hunt (fox-hunting with horses) and the sheep can be used in areas the horses will run through because they don't make holes in the pasture like the

cows do. They have handling equipment in the corners of the pastures and a stable of nice Border Collies to help them out. They have had predator losses when lambing on pasture but do not run any guardian dogs and avoided the problem by not lambing in the summer. A visit to their farm would make a good field trip!

They are working on a marketing contract that would require a lot of lambs and are interested in working with North Country Producers to buy lambs from this area in the future.

### **Shearing 2009**

Remember to plan ahead for shearing so your shearer can be efficient with their time. Have a piece of plywood or clean concrete area to shear on and an appropriate place to put the wool when they are done. A broom, extension chord and cold drink are good things to have handy, too. Hold your sheep off feed before the shearer comes so that they bend in the middle (the sheep, not the shearer) and keep the sheep bunched together so they are warm and the lanolin is easier to shear through.

Wool bags are available from Mid-States Wool Growers ([www.midstateswoolgrowers.com](http://www.midstateswoolgrowers.com) or 800-841-9665). You can also store the wool in heavy contractor bags or clean cardboard boxes that are stored in a dry place. And no...no one has gotten a check for last year's wool yet.

- Roger Hastings – 518-529-6665 - Roger is retired and has time to shear!
- Joe Seavey – 315-386-3363 - Joe is retired and wants to shear, too
- White Family – 315-386-1058
- Jim Baldwin – 607-257-1683 or [jbaldwin1@verizon.net](mailto:jbaldwin1@verizon.net) – for some of you in the southern end of the county or in Jefferson County Jim might be an option. Work together to share mileage since he is coming from further south.

**Basic Pasture/Grass-fed Lamb Meeting** – will be March 25<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 pm at the Extension Learning Farm. Topics include pasture basics, USDA grass-fed regulation, marketing ideas, pasturing tips specific to sheep and goats, and some plant basics from the agronomists. The meeting will be offered in Keesville on the 24<sup>th</sup> and Watertown on the 26<sup>th</sup> as well – call your local office for details. Charge is \$5.00 and food will be available. Call to register at 379-9192.

**Goat Health Basics Meeting** – \* **NOTE Date CHANGE** \*Saturday April 18<sup>th</sup> at 10:30 am we will have a meeting on the basics of goat health at the Extension Learning Farm. Topics will include vaccinating, preventive practices, what to look for and how to help your vet help you. We will have Dr. Caroline Pierce, DVM present to cover more advanced topics like mastitis and CAE. No charge, donations for refreshments appreciated. Register at 379-9192.

### **Marketing Committee**

A group of 5 to 10 producers will meet March 15<sup>th</sup> at the Extension Farm to talk more about our group marketing efforts. We have a couple ideas of possible markets for a couple different kinds of lambs. We need to decide whether we want to produce finished lambs, hothouse lambs, low-input feeder lambs or none of the above. Which type of lamb can we produce most efficiently? Do we want to process them at a local slaughterhouse? Some of the possibilities include working with other sheep farmers like the Dolans and the Kyles or direct to a processor. I have

received several calls from slaughterhouses from Illinois to New Jersey looking for lambs. As a matter of fact I had one looking for 200 fifty-pound goats today. We need to decide if we will form a co-op or a loose marketing association.

### **Stockdog News**

We need to work on a new ring for our stockdog training group this summer. Everyone I talk to says his or her Border Collies are going a little crazy with so little herding to do over the winter.

In the meantime, there are a couple **dogs looking for homes**. Jesse, is sister to my dog Tess, and originally comes from Ledge and Kathy Maynard in Antwerp. She was 8 in February. She is spayed and current on her vaccinations. She has been trained in basic obedience. Knows sit/stay/laydown. Energetic, smart, has never been trained to herd but has the natural instincts. She is bossy with other dogs and would be happiest as an only dog. On a real food (bone) diet due to allergies. Contact Maria Corse at 379-0196.

There is also a 1.5-year -ld male dog with papers. Has no herding experience (yet). Good with kids. Call Linda at 276-0223 (Canton area).

**Marketing News** – The Gouverneur Empire Livestock Graded Lamb Sale will be April 4<sup>th</sup> at noon. Sheep, lambs, goats and kids will be sold and lambs will be graded. Animals may be dropped off during the day on Friday the 3<sup>rd</sup> for grading. Call Jack Bero for more information at 287-0220 (sale barn) or 322-3500 (cell).