

NNY Sheep & Goat Newsletter – January 2009

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

By Small Livestock Educator Betsy Hodge

Hi Folks,

Happy New Year! My resolutions are to wipe out the thistles in my pastures (probably only partly attainable) and market a higher percentage of my lambs directly (more possible). I sold most of my big home lambs to the Dolans back in September but saved the smaller ones and fed them out for my freezer lamb customers and for retail cuts to sell out of my lamb freezer. I sold the freezer lamb for \$1.30 a pound live weight plus the processing cost. Most of these lambs weighed close to 100 pounds so that is \$130.00 with no marketing expense except delivering them to the butcher. These lambs would have brought very little at a sale back in the fall because they were kind of scrawny due to being the smaller triplet or born later in the lambing period. There must not be many freezer lambs around because my customers were anxious to have them and didn't blink at the price. I already have people calling for the retail lamb cuts that I don't have back from the USDA butcher yet.

All that said, it takes a lot more work to drop off, pick-up, make lots of phone calls, get everyone's cutting instructions, etc. In some cases, producers spend a lot of time at the farmer's market to sell directly. If I had 1000 lambs it would be impossible. With the 30 I have most years it makes sense (and cents).

Our beautiful fall hothouse lambs from the Extension Farm went to the Empire Graded Sale in Gouverneur. The price ranged from \$1.80 to \$1.50 per pound for an average of 56 pound lambs. They all graded blue which is the best grade (it goes blue, red, green). Most people I talked to were happy with the prices, even goat producers that sent nice kids received good prices. I did a comparison of what we might have gotten at New Holland had we sent them there. I assumed a 10% shrink but we have had even more when we sent to New Holland in the past. We had none on the lambs we sent to Gouverneur. While we might have gotten a little more if we sold the lambs to New Holland I was happy with the price, the short ride to Gouverneur and the fact that it supports a local sale. It is nice to send the lambs on Friday and get the check in the mail on Tuesday. I am still curious as to where the lambs go after the sale on a Saturday.

	Gouverneur	New Holland
Pounds of Lamb Sent	952	952
Pounds Sold	956	856
Shrink	0%	10%
Gross for Lambs	\$1596.00	\$1867.00
Gross per Lamb	\$93.91	\$109.76
Price/lb	\$1.50-\$1.80	\$2.18
Commission	\$119.00	\$85.00
Fee	\$10.00	\$10.00
Check-Off	\$ 6.90	\$ 6.90
Trucking	\$85.00	\$170.00
Total Net	\$1375.65	\$1589.07
Net/Lamb	\$80.92	\$ 93.47
Net/lb	\$ 1.43	\$ 1.67

% Marketing costs 19.4% 14.4% (does not include shrink)
Commission, Fee, Check-off and Trucking

Haylage Feeding

I mentioned last month that we started feeding haylage to the sheep at the farm. The haylage was mostly grass stored in an ag-bag. There was no spoilage to speak of and it smelled good all the way through. The sheep love it and spend all day standing at the bunk just chowing it down. Charlie tried to feed them just what they would clean up in a day. I was afraid we might get some sickness but the sheep have done very well on it and are ignoring the round bales in the feeders. Their body condition has stayed about the same. I thought they might get fat on the haylage just because they ate so much of it! I think we will try this again but make more of it because we used it up faster than we expected.

MEETINGS: lots of good sheep and goat meetings coming up this winter!

Goat Producers Meeting - Saturday January 31st

Goat enthusiasts of all kinds – meat, milk, pets - are welcome at a meeting from 1:00 to 3:00 pm at the Extension Learning Farm in Canton. We'll do some management topics and then talk about future meetings and getting organized to do some cooperative marketing. We will be joined by goat producers from Essex and Jefferson County via the Polycom.

Advanced Pasture Meeting in cooperation with ANCA (Adirondack North Country Association and Martha Pickard Grazing Specialist) – February 28, Madrid Community Center and evening of February 27 at Extension office in Watertown. We are working with ANCA to bring you Gene Schreifer from Wisconsin to talk about grass fattening and other pasture topics. Darrell Emmick the NY Grassland Management Specialist will be there, too, as well as a local beef farmer who is trying soil amendments. (See related article)

Co-op Meeting – March 4th

The Cornell Cooperatives specialist will be in town and I thought some of the sheep and goat producers would like to meet with him. More details to follow.

Basic Pasture meetings for Beef and Sheep Producers – Beef will be March 13th at 6:30 at the Extension Farm and the Sheep meeting will be March 25th also at the farm. Topics include pasture basics, USDA grass-fed regulation, marketing ideas, topics specific to the species and some plant basics from the agronomists. These meetings will be offered in neighboring counties as well so call you local office for more details.

Other Marketing News:

Easter will be April 12th and Greek Easter will be the 19th. I'm betting there will be a graded sale at Gouverneur so watch for that date. Another idea is to try the tele-auction. The tele-auction is only for hothouse lambs and kids (see the definition below)

The auction operates in the following manner:

1. During the 2nd to 3rd week of March, you estimate what the weight and quality grade of your animals will be as of March 27th.
2. You consign suckling kids and lambs to the tele-auction by March 23rd at 5 pm.

3. If you have at least 20 kids or lambs in the same weight/grade class, you indicate on the consignment form the lowest price per pound of live weight that you are willing to accept for them. This is called the "reserve price." If you do not have 20 animals in one class, try to combine your animals with those of a neighbor or friend so that you can state a reserve price together. Otherwise, the managers of the sale will decide on a fair reserve price for animals in the weight and grade class of your animals.
4. The sale takes place on March 27th at 9 am. Please note that you do not deliver your animals to the sale! Instead the sale takes place by phone. If the top price for your lot of animals is equal to or better than your reserve price, you are committed to deliver your animals to a centralized assembly point on April 1st. If your reserve price is not met, then your animals are not sold and you can instead sell them to a private buyer or take them to one of the many sale barns that hold Easter sales after March 27th.
5. Animals will be delivered to one of the following Empire Livestock sale barns:
 - Dryden on Tuesday 31 March 2009
 - Central Bridge on Wednesday 1 April 2009
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Some advantages of the tele-auction are that it is the first auction held during the Easter season, more buyers participate than usually are available at a local sale, and if the reserve price is not bid, your animals have not left the farm and co-mingled with animals of unknown health history.

Definition of a Hothouse Lamb – A young lamb that was raised on its mother and most often supplemented with creep feed. It is slaughtered at approximately six to ten weeks of age. Because it is still nursing its mother prior to slaughter, it has desirable fat cover. A hothouse lamb is not weaned. Weaning stresses the lamb, darkens the meat and reduces fat cover and apparent muscle thickness. In short, weaned lambs are not hothouse lambs and will not be accepted.

Definition of a Hothouse Kid – Fleshy, milk fed kids usually 12 weeks old and younger. Kids gaining less than 10 lbs per month or 1/3 lb per day after accounting for birth weight are generally not fleshy enough to be considered prime Easter kids. Prime Easter kids are generally gaining at least ½ lb daily. Weaned kids are not considered hothouse and will not be accepted. Tom Gallagher, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Albany County, is one of the organizers of the sale. Tom can be reached at 518-765-3500 or TJG3@cornell.edu. There are more details at the Cornell Sheep Webpage as well at www.sheep.cornell.edu.

Holidays later in the year to note and keep in mind when planning your marketing strategy:

beginning of Ramadan about August 22nd and the end of Ramada about September 20th.
Rosh Hashanah falls on September 19th
The Festival of the Sacrifice is really early -- November 27th this year.