



Dakota Lamb Growers Co-op News

Proudly serving producers in the
Upper Midwest



Volume 13, Issue 1

Spring 2024

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From DLGC President Riley Braaten

Greetings Fellow Shepherds,

Well here we are almost at Easter time already and what a nice mild winter we have endured so far this year. Most producers are well underway lambing, and I hope for a successful lamb crop for our producers with much better and hopefully steady prices for our lambs and culls. Ramadan has definitely brought excellent prices for these 80 – 100 lb lambs, as well as cash fat lambs in the \$2.10 - \$2.30 range. Cull ewes have finally seen a nice rally with your average culls that are in the 158 lb range bringing \$0.65 - \$1.00 lb with these heavy ewes over 300 lbs bringing \$1.10+ lb.

There have been many calls and concerns regarding Superior Farms and the packing plant in Denver. It's not closing at this point. There is however an initiative on the ballot this fall to vote on whether a slaughterhouse can continue within the city limits of Denver.

The DLGC board is currently working on updating every producer's biography for our records. The information we need and are asking for is current number of ewes, how many lambs are produced and marketed each year, etc. It has been Dakota Lamb Grower Co-op's main objective to raise a high quality lamb that is very desirable for Superior Farms and all consumers. We want to continue to raise a consistent product that makes our Cooperative stand out in the industry.

As spring planting and those long busy days begin, let's remember to not forget about doing the best we can with our lambs and perhaps 2024 will rewarded us with better pricing for our efforts. Whether it's a fat lamb, breeding stock, or crops.

May you find all the tagged ears in your flock alive and well.

Riley Braaten, President
Call or text me at 701-640-8335

Please Welcome these New Members

Brandon Feldewerd , Melrose, MN Sheep Producer since 2015	100 Ewes
Ken & Brenda Jensen , Tyler, MN Sheep Producer since 1984	106 Ewes (Katahdin/Suffolk cross)
Jon Peterson , Peterson, MN Sheep Producer since 1988	200 Ewes (Dorset, Shropshire, Texel)
Tom Scarponcini , Rushford, MN Sheep Producer since 1975	80 Ewes (Ile de France)

Purchasing Feeder Lamb Guidelines

DLGC members are dedicated to producing high quality lamb meat. We encourage our members to deliver homegrown lambs under their current contract with Superior Farms. There are always some instances where a member has the opportunity to purchase additional lambs to supplement their numbers. Here are the steps involved with purchasing feeder lambs:

- 1) Prior approval from DLGC and Superior Farms before purchasing.
- 2) Must be purchased from a known source (not stockyard lambs).
- 3) Lambs may not be delivered as ABF under your contract.

Member Survey Coming Soon

Did you join DLGC more than 2 years ago? Watch your in-box for a 'Member Survey' coming out soon. It should take just a few minutes to fill out but will give the board valuable information about your operation. They look forward to getting to know you and your operation a little better.

For Sale

Please send any **Wanted** or **For Sale** ads to Phyllis. They will be added to the weekly carcass market report, posted on the DLGC webpage, and put in the next newsletter.

- ♦ For Sale, LGD puppies born Feb. 16, 2024 will be ready 1st week of April. Raised around sheep, goats, chickens, cats and children. Contact Travis Fowler at 507-236-5055
- ♦ Active DLGC member Justin Weatherford from Florence, SD is buying all classes of wool. Please call him at 605-520-8237 with any questions, concerns, and prices for your wool marketing. He is an independent buyer working to bring an additional outlet for wool in our region. Thanks for checking it out.

Decline in Sheep and Lamb Inventory Indicates Opportunity for Ranchers

Travis W. Hoffman, NDSU/UofMN Extension Sheep Specialist

The all sheep and lamb inventory in the U.S. on Jan. 1 totaled 5.03 million head, down 2% from 2023, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service. The report indicated a year-over-year decrease of 2% in North Dakota, 3% in Minnesota and 9% in South Dakota. Full report available at: <https://downloads.usda.library.cornell.edu/usda-esmis/files/000000018/b8517891v/zv130s885/shep0124.pdf>

"U.S. lamb consumption was 1.1 pounds per person per year for 2023, and has room for growth domestically and abroad," says Travis Hoffman, sheep specialist for NDSU Extension and UMN Extension. "We have the opportunity to rebuild our U.S. numbers to compete against imported lamb and match demand, as feeder and slaughter lamb prices are forecasted to increase 3% to 7% in 2024 and 2025."

The U.S. breeding ewe and ram inventory declined 2% with 60,000 fewer head, to 3.67 million head. This decrease is expected to lead to a 1% to 4% decline in U.S. lamb production in 2024 and 2025, according to the Livestock Marketing Information Center.

South Dakota is seventh in the nation in breeding sheep with 158,000 head. Minnesota is ranked 13th with 79,000 head, and North Dakota is 27th with 45,000 head.

The 2023 lamb crop of 3.03 million head was down 2% from 2022, and the January 2024 market lamb and sheep inventory, reported at 1.36 million head, was down 2% from 2023.

The 2023 North Dakota lamb crop decreased 8% to 44,000 head, year over year, but gained 7% in production efficiency, reaching 119 lambs per 100 ewes. Though there are fewer ewes, North Dakota producers are improving their management and return per ewe, says Hoffman.

The Minnesota lamb crop dropped 6% to 85,000 head of lambs. However, Minnesota is second only to Virginia for sheep production efficiency in the nation with 133 lambs produced per 100 ewes.

South Dakota leads the Northern Plains region, producing 175,000 head with an intermediate lambing efficiency of 122 lambs per 100 ewes in 2023.

Shorn wool production in the U.S. was 22.7 million pounds in 2023, with an average weight of 7 pounds and a \$1.56 per pound average price paid. The total value for wool produced was \$35.3 million.

According to Hoffman, Minnesota sheep producers tend to emphasize performance with a variety of medium wool breeds in small-to-medium farm flocks, while larger operations with fine wool breeds are more common in western North and South Dakota.

Wool prices for medium wools have remained sluggish over the past several years, averaging \$0.30 per pound in Minnesota, while fine-fibered wools had higher returns, averaging \$0.95 per pound in North Dakota and \$1.25 per pound in South Dakota.

Overall, current feeder and slaughter lamb prices have remained high to begin the year with prices of more than \$250 per hundredweight for 60-to-90-pound lambs expected for the spring.

"The enthusiasm of young producers is evident, and with lower U.S. sheep supply, opportunity exists for near or greater than \$200/hundredweight slaughter lambs this summer, resulting in a profitable 2024 lamb crop enterprise," Hoffman says.

Urinary Calculi (Waterbelly)

Kelly Froehlich, *former SDSU Extension Specialist*

Urinary calculi or waterbelly is a condition of male rams and wethers and are often problematic in lambs on a finisher and growing diet. It is the formation of tiny stones in the urethra causing blockage and retention of urine leading to the death of the animal. Prevention is easier than treatment. So how can we prevent this from happening?

Well first we need to understand this problem doesn't happen overnight. Second that excess phosphorus and an imbalance of dietary minerals can lead to this problem, specifically our calcium: phosphorus ratios. Our growing and finishing diets with high grain will naturally be higher in phosphorus and low in calcium. By itself this disrupts our ideal 2:1 calcium to phosphorus ratio leading to urinary calculi. This makes it important to ensure our diets are properly balanced and we don't voluntarily add additional phosphorus into the diet. A sneaky source sometimes found in minerals is dicalcium phosphate.

So now how to prevent it. First ensuring a balanced diet. With the high amount of grain, we will have a lack of calcium, therefore diets will need additional calcium. Limestone is commonly added and doesn't add additional phosphate. Additionally, ammonium chloride can be added to growing and finishing diets. This helps acidifies the urine and helps prevent the formation of the stones in the urethra. Lastly, ensuring your lambs have fresh, clean water always. Taking these preventions should help prevent urinary calculi and avoid the headache of it.

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I wanted to take the time to say **thank you!** As some of you may know, I have resigned from my position as a Sheep and Goat Extension specialist at SDSU effective February 5th. There have been several issues and challenges in the past few months/year that led to this hard decision, but ultimately is 100% the right decision for me. I feel honored to have served in this role and am grateful for those who have supported me, opened their farms to me and have given me words of advice and wisdom since starting this role at SDSU. Sheep people are truly the best!

Currently, I am enjoying my favorite season, lambing, at my family farm in Minnesota. We are in the early stages, with only 50 out of 210 ewes lambing thus far. While I am not straying too far from the barn right now, I plan to continue my involvement in the sheep industry. I have a few projects in the works, and I hope to see many of you at industry events and am looking forward to a bright and happier future.

As I transition my role and next chapter of life, I encourage you to keep in touch. You can reach me by phone, 612-999-3337, email kellyssheep@gmail.com, or feel free to add me on Facebook.



Colostrum and Lamb Survival

Emilie Josse, SDSU Student

Hi everyone. My name is Emilie, and I am a French student. I'm in my second year of a master's degree in agronomy, specializing in animal science and breeding, at InstitutAgro Rennes-Angers, a government-run agronomy university in France. I'm currently working in the Dairy & Food Science department at South Dakota State University, and my internship is scheduled to continue until July 2024. I'm working with Drs. Maristela Rovai and Kelly Froehlich. My internship focuses on lamb survival at birth, particularly the importance of colostrum in ewes. We're interested in gaining a deeper understanding of sheep rearing practices in the US, and we're open to insights from other regions as well. Specifically, we're keen to explore opinions and methods related to colostrum management.

We have created a survey that you can access through the following link: <https://forms.gle/iAXJpGLX4g7mBSNp7>. Don't worry, it will only take a few minutes! Please feel free to pass it on. Thank you in advance for your support with my project!

Contacts:

SDSU Student Intern, at emilie.josse@agrocampus.fr

SDSU Extension Dairy Specialist, at maristela.rovai@sdstate.edu

Sheep Expert, at kellyssheep@gmail.com

International Lamb Trade Webinar Available for Producers

Travis W. Hoffman, NDSU/UofMN Extension Sheep Specialist

The University of Minnesota Extension and North Dakota State University Extension hosted an International Lamb Trade and Economics webinar on Feb. 8, 2024. The YouTube recording is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkSdqHhVCIA>

U.S. Meat Export Federation's Jessica Spreitzer, director of trade analysis, and Courtney Heller, director of export services, provided a summary of international lamb trade in 2023 and opportunities for future success in 2024. Spreitzer and Heller work with a wide variety of information to provide analysis on the U.S. red meat industry and global trade to both domestic and international stakeholders. The federation is the trade association responsible for developing international markets for the U.S. red meat industry.

"U.S. lamb consumption is 1.1 pounds per person per year, and has room for growth domestically and abroad," says Travis Hoffman, sheep specialist for NDSU Extension and UMN Extension. "Our lamb industry hinges on markets at a global level, and imports and exports affect our producers."

All previous webinars are available at: <https://www.youtube.com/@uofmextensionsheepandgoats2944>. Upcoming webinars include Value Added Wool on March 14th, and Sheep & Goat Grazing Management on April 29th.

Watching for Gastrointestinal Diseases in Young Lambs

Jaelyn Whaley, SDSU Extension Sheep Field Specialist

The majority of mortality in young lambs occurs within the first 3 days of life, but that doesn't mean that they avoid illness until weaning. A lamb's immune system is not fully developed until approximately 14 days of age leaving them particularly vulnerable to gastrointestinal diseases such as *Clostridium perfringens* types C and D. Another major cause of lamb losses is coccidiosis. Working with your veterinarian and taking the proper precautions can help promote lamb survival through weaning.

Clostridium perfringens (also known as Enterotoxemia) is a bacteria that damages the intestinal lining of lambs. Most commonly, we vaccinate for *Clostridium perfringens* type C and D. Unfortunately, asymptomatic death results if lambs experience a proliferation of *C. perfringens*. Type C is more common in younger lambs and causes dysentery and intestinal hemorrhages making the intestine look dark red/purple. *Clostridium perfringens* type D is more commonly known as "overeating disease" or "pulpy kidney." Young (often orphan) lambs receiving too much milk or older lambs being transitioned onto concentrate feeds or very lush pastures may experience overeating disease. Upon necropsy, the kidneys may appear darker red and feel soft or "pulpy." Treatment has limited success, so prevention is the best option for C and D enterotoxemia. Vaccinating pregnant ewes approximately 4 weeks prior to lambing will transfer antibodies through the colostrum. Then, lambs can most effectively use the C&D Toxoid vaccine at 14 and again at 21 days of age. Slow transition to high concentration feeds is also critical in preventing both overeating and acidosis. Other types of *C. perfringens* (A, D, and E) can also affect lambs. Autogenous vaccines can be developed through veterinary diagnostic labs to help treat other forms of enterotoxemia.

Coccidiosis can often pose a challenge to producers due to asymptomatic losses especially of older, apparently healthy lambs. *Eimeria* (commonly called coccidia) is the protozoal agent that causes coccidiosis. *Eimeria* species commonly exist in the digestive system, but only two species are considered pathogenic. Lambs ingest *Eimeria*, and the protozoa embed themselves into intestinal cells. As the protozoa reproduce, it causes the cells to rupture. You may see bloody stools and weight loss, but lambs may also never show any symptoms. It often looks like the lambs just are not getting enough to eat because the coccidia has done so much damage to the intestine. If coccidia oocysts are seen in fecal samples, coccidiostats (i.e., amprolium, decoquinate) can treat the illness. These also can be added to feed or water as a preventative. For example, 2 lb of decoquinate can be added to 50 lb of free choice salt. *Eimeria* are susceptible to sunlight, so infection often occurs inside the barn. Sanitation can also help prevent coccidiosis including clean, dry bedding and cleaning with bleach.

If lambs survive these gastrointestinal diseases, they may show reduced performance due to reduced nutrient absorption from damaged intestinal cells. Having a close relationship with a veterinarian is critical for overall flock health, but they can also help with necropsies and disease diagnosis. As we see lamb prices start to climb (and hopefully continue), we must be ensuring lamb survival and promoting future performance.

Superior Farms

Mark Dumdi; mark.dumdi@superiorfarms.com; (303) 886-1613

Hello Dakota Lamb Growers Members,

Just a friendly reminder we appreciate clean lambs! As a company, Dirty lambs are something we struggle with during times of inclement weather. It slows down our chain speed and is extremely hard on equipment and the kill floor team. Dirty lambs create contamination issues and can create problems with the USDA. Clean lambs are crucial to our ability to run efficiently. Producers taking proactive steps to shear, kill strip or bed heavier during inclement weather greatly helps with our ability to process lambs through the system during the winter. Please don't wait until the last minute to schedule your lambs to be shipped. As you watch the weights of your lambs schedule with the shipper far enough out, so you don't miss your sweet spot. If you are not already using the Superior Farms Producer App let's, get you started. Please reach out to Karissa Isaacs at karissa.isaacs@superiorfarms.com.

Slaughterhouse Ban in Denver, Colorado

The DLGC is closely following a ballot initiative that seeks to prohibit slaughterhouses in the city of Denver, Colorado. The measure unfairly targets only one business – Superior Farms. If it passes, the measure would force Superior Farms to shut down. In March the Board of Directors of DLGC approved a donation of \$2,000 to the “Stop the Ban. Protect Jobs” campaign.

If this initiative were to pass in Denver, it would negatively impact the state's economy and agricultural industry. A ripple effect might be felt all across the nation affecting additional slaughterhouses.

Superior Farms in Denver has 160 employee-owners. They could face the loss of income and health care. The facility annually processes over 500,000 sheep. DLGC delivered over 12,500 fat lambs to Denver in 2023.

How can we help? Please share information about the proposal with your friends, family and business associates who live in Denver. Educate them about the negative impacts of this measure on your sheep operation. We need them to help educate the Denver residents about how important agriculture is for everyone. We all need to promote the “Stop the Ban. Protect Jobs” campaign.

Alternative Quality Forages

Justin Fruechte, Renovo Seed, Product Expert

Spring planting is upon us, and it is time to pull the trigger on how we'll feed the flock throughout the year. If you've been refreshing your cropping budgets without any marketed grains, you'll find it may be time to look at a feed option to cash out through livestock.

To write about quality forages for sheep, I need to first mention that the queen of forages that fits best as a component in gestation and lactation diets is alfalfa. Alfalfa is without a doubt, the most popular high protein forage used by producers across the country. It is adaptable, high yielding, and consistent. Most all livestock producers should be using some level of alfalfa or alfalfa/grass in their operation for hay. If you want to increase forage longevity, add a grass such as orchard or endophyte free tall forage fescue.

If you are historically limited with moisture, Sainfoin may be a more suitable option than alfalfa. Sainfoin is a long lived, drought tolerant, hardy perennial legume. In a two-cut system its yield rivals alfalfa along with its protein content. Its other benefits include being bloat free and having resistance to alfalfa weevils and leaf hoppers. It tends to have more susceptibility to root pathogens and should not be used on low wet soils. I've seen Sainfoin used best when seeded in a mixture of perennial cool season forage grasses.

Forage Peas will be a popular spring seeded forage utilized this year. It is best to use forage peas in combination with a cereal grain. To optimize protein content, use a blend of 60% forage peas with 40% forage barley. Look to plant this as soon as the field is ready in March/April and you'll allow yourself an opportunity to double crop with a warm season annual forage in June. Yield on pea/barley, pea/oat, or pea/triticale blends will be around 3-ton dry matter per acre. This makes for a hefty windrow to cure correctly, so most growers have a backup plan to make baleage/haylage from these fields. Harvesting as wet feed will also help ensure higher protein and more palatable feed. If put up as dry hay, you'll likely find ewes sorting and wasting larger stems from the grains.

When June rolls around and you are searching for another high protein forage option, look to Teff grass. Teff is an annual warm season grass that has proven to make hay as high as 17% crude protein content. This small seeded specie needs to be seeded shallow into a firm seed bed, much like you'd plant alfalfa into. Allow for 70 days before the first cutting, and with ample nitrogen and moisture you'll have another cutting 25 days later. We've been extremely impressed with the quality of teff grass and can be used much like alfalfa hay in a diet without the risk of bloat.

The last annual forage to mention is Italian Ryegrass. This is a cool season bi-annual grass with great persistence and quality. It is mostly used for dairies due to its extremely high digestibility and potential alfalfa substitution for high-producing cows. Also, its palatability and yield has also made it a great fit for sheep producers. In the upper Midwest it should be seeded in the spring and harvested 3-4 times throughout the season. Expect a highly digestible feed with crude protein levels at 16-18%. Harvest it as wet feed as it has a waxy leaf which inhibits proper dry down for hay.

Alternative forages provide opportunities for sheep producers. Know your normal feed cost ration, and compare and budget forage options. Take the time now to get the right plan in place and don't be afraid to look at an alternative that could fit well for your cropping system and sheep diets.