



Maryland Sheep & Goat Producer



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Pasture Performance Testing Program to Start in Maryland

Goats in 2006 - Lambs in 2007

A Pasture Performance Testing Program for Sheep and Goats will be initiated at the Western Maryland Research & Education Center (WMREC, in Keedysville, MD) in 2006. The test will alternate between sheep and goats. The 2006 test will be for male goats (wether and buck kids). The 2007 test will be for male lambs (wether and ram lambs).

Who's eligible? The test is open to any breed or breed cross of sheep or goat. A producer may consign up to 5 animals for a maximum test group of 50. Maryland producers will be given priority to fill half of the test. Otherwise, participation in the test is open to

producers in any state and will be based on a first-come, first-serve basis. Consigners will be required to sign a statement releasing the University of Maryland from any liability. There will be a fee of \$75 per goat tested.

Goats born between December 15, 2005, and March 15, 2006, will be eligible for the 2006 test. They must have received two vaccinations for *clostridium perfringens* type C and T and tetanus (CD-T), have properly trimmed hooves, and carry proper scrapie identification. All goats will be inspected upon arrival. Unsound and unhealthy animals will not be permitted entry. Upon arrival, lambs or goats will be weighed, dewormed, and ear tagged with a WMREC ear tag.

Resources. Resources for the pasture test include 10 acres of pasture: 7 acres of orchardgrass and/or tall fescue, with some clover mixed in; 2 acres of chicory; and 1 acre of birdsfoot trefoil. The pasture is rectangularly-shaped with a central lane way containing three 6' x 10' Port-a-Hut shelters and a handling system. The pasture is divided into five 2-acre paddocks for rotational grazing. Each paddock has access to the central lane-way. The animals will be rotated to a new paddock based on forage availability. The 10-acre pasture is enclosed in 6-strand high-tensile electric fencing. Sub-division fences are semi-permanent electric wire.

Water is available in each of the paddocks. Lambs and goats will have access to free choice minerals while grazing. A technician

Educating People to Help Themselves

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will be hired part-time to provide daily care and inspection of the animals. Susan Schoenian will oversee the test and data collection and coordinate educational programs in conjunction with the testing program.

Management. All lambs or goats will be grazed and managed as a single group. The 2006 test will start on June 10th and last for approximately 120 days. At the end of the testing period, producers can pick up their animals or have them transported to a local livestock auction for selling.

While on test, the lambs or goats will be handled every 2 weeks to determine FAMACHA© eye scores, body condition scores, and britch soiling scores. This information will be recorded and used to determine the need for deworming individual animals. Lambs or goats scoring 3, 4, or 5 on the FAMACHA© scale will be dewormed with either Cydectin® or Levamisol. Any animal with bottle jaw will be dewormed regardless of eye score. Body condition and britch soiling will also be used as criteria for making deworming decisions.

In 2004, there was an outbreak of meningeal worm in goats grazing at WMREC. Due to the time frame of the outbreak, it seemed that the goats came with the infection; however, there is no guarantee that they did not pick up the infection at WMREC. Any lamb or goat showing signs of meningeal worm will be aggressively treated with anthelmintics and anti-inflammatory drugs. If meningeal worm is perceived to be a "significant" risk, lambs or goats will be dewormed monthly with either ivermectin or fenbendazole (SafeGuard®).

The lambs or goats will be weighed every 4 weeks in order to calculate pasture rate-of-gain. Fecal samples will be collected to measure resistance to internal parasites, as evidenced by fecal egg counts. The lambs or goats will be dewormed upon arrival so that they start the test on an equal basis with regards to parasite load.

To receive an information packet and nomination form, contact Susan Schoenian at (301) 432-2767 x343 or sschoen@umd.edu. Information about consigning animals will be in the next newsletter and will be placed on the Internet simultaneously with release of the newsletter.

Editor's note: The only other "pasture" test I am

aware of is in Texas and is sponsored by the American Meat Goat Association and supervised by Texas A&M University. It is a 200-day range performance test. 150 goats (number varies according to range conditions), weighing a minimum of 80 lbs, are run on a 2-pasture rotation, consisting of 827 acres. The goats are weighed every 50 days. The cost of entering a buck or wether in the test is \$75.

2006 West Virginia Ram Evaluation Program

Nominations for the 2006 West Virginia Ram Evaluation Program are due March 1. Rams of any breed, born between January 1 and February 28, 2006 are eligible for the test. While preference will be given to West Virginia producers, out-of-state breeders will be accepted if space is available. A post-test sale will be held for eligible rams.

For more information about the program and a nomination form, contact Brad Smith at (304) 257-4688 or Brad.Smith@mail.wvu.edu or Fane Irvine at (304) 799-4852 or Fane.Irvine@mail.wvu.edu.

Small Ruminant Industry Continues to Grow in U.S.

January 27, 2006 – For the second consecutive year, U.S. sheep numbers increased. The sheep and lamb inventory in the United States on January 1, 2006, totaled 6.23 million head, up 2 percent from both 2005 and 2004. The inventory began increasing in 2005 and has shown two consecutive year-to-year increases for the first time since 1987 and 1988. The number of ewes shorn was down slightly from 2004, suggesting that the growth in the sheep industry is probably due to increases in hair (meat) sheep numbers. The average price paid for wool in 2005 was 0.71 per pound. The 2005 lambing rate was 115 lambs per 100 ewes one year old and older, up 2 percent from 2004.

Goats Increase 5%. The total U.S. goat and kid inventory also increased, totaling 2.83 million head on January 1, 2006, up 4 percent from 2005. The meat (and other) goat inventory increased 5 percent from 2005 and was 2.26 million head. The milk goat inventory increased 1 percent while the number of An-

gora goats declined 1 percent.

In Maryland. Contrary to the national trend, Maryland's sheep and lamb inventory showed a 4 percent decrease, going from 23,000 head in 2004 to 22,200 head in 2005. Maryland's percent lamb crop was only 111 percent, a figure below the national average and considerably below potential. The average price paid for wool in Maryland increased from 0.41/lb. in 2004 to 0.56/lb. in 2005.

Maryland's milk goat inventory stayed the same at 3,300 head. Meat (and other) goats increased from 9,450 to 10,000 head, almost a 6 percent increase. There are too few Angora goats to be counted in Maryland.

USDA statistics are based on a random sample of sheep and goat producers. While both large and small operations are reflected in the survey, larger producers are sampled more heavily than small operations, and this may skew the accuracy of data in small states like Maryland. (Source: USDA-NASS)

Cydectin® Oral Drench Approved for Sheep

On November 30, 2005, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the use of Cydectin® Oral Drench in sheep. Earlier in the year, Cydectin 1% Injectable was approved for use in cattle. Previously, the only way sheep producers could use Cydectin® was to use the cattle pour-on product (orally) or horse product (Quest® paste). Both uses constituted extra-label drug use and required veterinary approval.

The active ingredient in Cydectin® is moxidectin. Moxidectin is effective against the adult and L4 larval stages of *Haemonchus contortis*, *Teladorsagia circumcincta*, *T. trifurcata*, *Tristrongylus axei*, *T. colubriformis*, *T. vitrinus*, *Cooperia curticei*, *C. Oncophora*, *Oesophagostum columbianum*, *O. venulosum*, *Nematodirus battus*, *N. filicollis*, and *N. spathiger*. Moxidectin is not effective against tapeworms.

The labeled dosage for the sheep drench is 1 ml per 11 lbs by mouth (or 1 ml per 5 kg). The withdrawal period is 7 days for slaughter animals. No withdrawal has been established for dairy sheep. Thus, the product should not be used on ewes that are producing milk for human consumption.

Recommendations for using Cydectin®:

1. *Do not use Cydectin on a regular basis.*

Why? The more often you use an anthelmintic the more rapid the worms become resistant to it. Eventually, the drug will become ineffective at reducing parasite burdens and result in the death of some animals.

2. *When deworming, do not treat all animals in the flock/herd.*

Why? Treating all animals increases the rate by which the worms become resistant to the drug. Plus, it's not likely that all animals in a flock/herd need treated. It is estimated that approximately only 20% of the flock/herd is responsible for laying the majority of worm eggs in a pasture.

3. *Save Cydectin® for clinically parasitized animals.*

Why? Cydectin®, along with Levamisol (trade names Levasol®, Tramisol®, and Prohibit®), is probably the most effective anthelmintics available to producers. According to various university studies, resistance levels tend to be much higher among the Benzimidazoles (SafeGuard® and Valbazan®) and ivermectin. Some resistance is found in Levamisol and has begun to develop in Cydectin®. We need to do all we can to prolong the effectiveness of both drugs.

4. *Use the FAMACHA© system to determine when to deworm individual animals.*

Why? The barber pole worm (*Haemonchus contortis*) is the primary parasite affecting sheep/goats in warm, moist climates like Maryland. It is a blood-sucking parasite that causes blood and protein loss in the host, as evidenced by pale mucous membranes. The FAMACHA© system utilizes a color eye chart that shows varying degrees of anemia (1-red, 2-pinkish-red, 3-pink, 4-pinkish-white, and 5-white) and gives treatment recommendations based on eye scores.

5. *Do not underdose your sheep.*

Why? A partial treatment may be insufficient to save a severely parasitized animal. In addition, it will accelerate the development of drug resistant worms. Dose animals individually according to their weight. Buy or borrow scales so you know what your animals weigh. Weigh tapes can be used for goats.

What About Goats?

No form of Moxidectin has been FDA-approved for use in goats. Thus, goat producers must continue to follow the guidelines of extra label drug use. Extra-label drug use requires veterinary approval. Goat producers should also consult their veterinarians to get proper dosage recommendations. Goats metabolize anthelmintics differently and usually require higher dosages than sheep, cattle, and horses. As with sheep, oral dosing is recommended over injectable and pour-on products. Injectable and pour-on cattle products can be delivered orally to goats.

EQIP Your Farm

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program, known by its acronym EQIP, is a voluntary conservation program for farmers and ranches. EQIP offers contracts that provide incentive payments and cost-sharing for conservation practices, such as manure management systems, pest management, erosion control, and other practices to improve and maintain the health of natural resources. EQIP may cost-share up to 75% of the costs of certain conservation practices. High priority is given to assistance where agricultural improvements will help meet water quality objectives. The application process is competitive and limited to available funds.

The next sign-up period for the EQIP program is February 5-February 24, 2006. For more information or to sign up, contact your local NRCS or Soil Conservation District office.

Editor's note: To qualify for EQIP payments, producers must have a minimum number of animal units and file a schedule F with their tax return.

Upcoming Events

Westminster, Maryland - Shearing Schools

Beginning and Advanced Shearing Schools will be held in Westminster on March 17-18 and April 1, respectively. The beginning school is open to anyone who wants to learn to shear sheep and has the strength and

willingness to do so. The minimum age is 16. The advanced school is for persons who have attended previous schools and have sheared over 150 sheep. Participation is limited to the first 25 people who register (beginning school); 10 for advanced school. The registration fee is \$50 for the beginning school and \$25 for the advanced school.

For more details and/or to register, contact David Greene at (410) 329-6241 or greelamb@bcpl.net.

Kingwood, West Virginia - Rural Enterprise Conference

The 5th Annual Rural Enterprise Conference will be held at the Robert C. Byrd Regional Training Institute (Camp Dawson) in Kingwood, West Virginia, on Saturday, March 21. The Conference is being sponsored by the Garrett-Preston Rural Development Coalition.

The Conference will include many topics pertaining to small ruminant production and replaces the annual Meat Goat Conference, usually held at Garrett College. The spring meeting of the MPWV Meat Goat Producers Association will also be held in conjunction with the Conference.

For more information and/or to register, send an e-mail to Info@MoreFarmMoney.org or contact Willie Lantz at (301) 334-6960 or wlantz@umd.edu. Visit the conference web site at www.MoreFarmMoney.org.

Frederick, Maryland - Small Ruminants 101

As part of its 2006 Non-traditional Farming Enterprise Lecture Series, Frederick County Cooperative Extension will host a two-part course, *Sheep and Goat Enterprise Development 101* on April 20 and 27 from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Frederick County Extension Office. The course will be targeted towards beginning producers and people considering starting new sheep and/or goat enterprises. Discussion topics will include the advantages and disadvantages of raising sheep and/or goats for meat, milk, fiber, or vegetation control; resources needed to raise sheep and/or goats; and basic feeding, breeding, and management

principles.

Space is limited, so register early to ensure your space in the program. The registration fee is \$5 (or \$15 for all four lecture topics). Other lecture topics include aquaculture, free-range poultry, and natural resource enterprises. Contact Terry Poole at (301) 694-1594 x13577 or tepoole@umd.edu to register.

Princess Anne, Maryland - Sheep and Goat Auction

The Lower Shore Goat and Sheep Producers Association will be hosting a goat and sheep auction on April 29th at 1 p.m. at the Somerset County Fairgrounds in Princess Anne, MD. The sale will include animals for 4-H and youth projects, as well as breeding stock. The University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) will have some animals in the sale as will other members of the Association. Contact Dr. Whitley at (410) 651-6194 or nwhitley@umes.edu for additional details.

Rock Springs, Pennsylvania - Meat Goat Nutrition Workshop

A Meat Goat Nutrition Workshop will be held on Saturday, April 29, 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., at the Meat Animal Evaluation Center in Rock Springs, PA (near State College). Sponsors of the workshop include Penn State Cooperative Extension, the PA Association of County Agricultural Agents, and the Keystone Goat Producers Association. Workshop topics will include basic nutrition of the meat goat; feeding the pregnant doe; site and soil evaluation for pasture species selection; and fencing for goats. A trade show is being planned in conjunction with the workshop.

The registration deadline is April 17th. The registration fee is \$40 for the first family member and \$20 for each additional family member. For more information, contact Gene Schurman at (724) 465-3880 or exs10@psu.edu.

Winchester, Virginia - Forum for Rural Innovation

The 2nd Annual Forum for Rural Innovation will be held Friday, March 10, 2006 at the Best Western Lee-Jackson Motor Inn &

Conference Center in Winchester, Virginia. The purpose of the Forum is to showcase replicable innovative ideas, projects or programs that enhance farm or rural business profitability, conserve farm land and natural resources, or develop new approaches to rural prosperity that are viable in an expensive farmland-up-scale consumer environment. One of the speakers will be Dr. David Redwine, co-founder of the Scott County Hair Sheep Association which cooperatively markets lamb to a supermarket chain.

A registration fee of \$35 per person will include the forum program, morning refreshments, and buffet lunch. Registration information is available on-line at www.LoudounFarms.org or by calling 703-777-0426. Pre-registration by March 3rd is required.

Just for Youth

NEW! - Sheep and Wool Skillathon

A Sheep and Goat Skillathon will be held at the Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival on Sunday, May 7, 8 a.m. to 12 noon. Any youth between the ages of 8 and 18 is eligible to compete as an individual and as a member of a four-person team. There will be junior (8-13) and senior (14-18) age divisions. The top ten individuals and top three teams will be recognized.

The skillathon will combine learning with competition. It will include various stations for youth to learn and/or be tested on their knowledge of sheep and wool. To register for the skillathon, contact Susan Schoenian at (301) 432-2767 x343 or sschoen@umd.edu. The registration deadline is April 21. There is no registration fee.

Disease In-Depth

Floppy Kid Syndrome

Floppy kid syndrome was first documented in 1987. While the cause is unknown, the disease can spread rapidly through a herd. All breeds can be affected. Cases tend to occur most commonly late in the kidding season.

Between 3 and 10 days of age, affected

kids develop muscle weakness associated with metabolic acidosis. They are usually depressed. They can swallow, but are usually reluctant to nurse. They may cough or drool. No gastrointestinal or respiratory problems are evident, though gastrointestinal disease is suspected to be the cause of the syndrome.

Affected kids appear normal at birth. If a kid is born "floppy," it could be white muscle disease. In fact, many kids with white muscle disease, abomasal bloat, colibacillosis, septicemia, or enterotoxemia have been mistakenly described as floppy kids.

Mild cases of floppy kid syndrome can be treated with oral bicarbonate (i.e. baking soda). Kids usually improve within 2 hours after administration of bicarb. They may need to be fed milk with a stomach tube. More severe cases may require an IV of sodium bicarbonate. IV fluids usually help the severely affected kid. Spontaneous recovery is possible, as are prolonged recoveries and relapses. Because the cause is not known, there are no preventative or therapeutic treatments.

Research

FAMACHA© Works!

A study was undertaken in 2005 at the Western Maryland Research and Education Center (WMREC) to determine the efficacy (and practicality) of the FAMACHA© system for controlling internal parasitism in grazing lambs.

Eighty-four (84) crossbred and purebred Katahdin lambs were used in the study. They were rotationally grazed on approximately 13 acres of pasture, planted in cool season perennial grasses, including two acres of chicory. They had access to minerals, but were not supplemented otherwise. The lambs arrived at the research center on June 10th. They were approximately 3 months of age and averaged 57 lbs. at the start of the study. Before being released onto the pasture, they were weighed and handled to determine their FAMACHA© eye score and body condition score. Lambs scoring 3, 4, or 5 on the FAMACHA© scale were dewormed with ivermectin. Lambs scoring 1 or 2 were not treated for internal parasites. This procedure was repeated every two weeks dur-

ing the duration of the project. The lambs were weighed at 4-week intervals and average daily gains were computed. Fecal samples were collected (rectally) on three occasions (four weeks apart) and analyzed for fecal egg counts (eggs per gram) determination using the Wisconsin method. At the conclusion of the study, the ewe lambs were sold via sealed bid auction and the wether lambs were taken to a local livestock auction.

Results. The average ending weight of the lambs was 86.5 lbs. Average daily gain for the 112-day period was 0.3 lbs. per day. One hundred and

Date	# lambs dewormed
June 10	3
June 24	8
July 11	56
July 22	25
Aug 5	0
Aug 19	8
Sept 2	7
Sept 19	2
Sept 30	1
Total	111

eleven (111) anthelmintic treatments were administered during the study. The number of treatments administered varied from 0 (August 5) to 56 (July 11) Each lamb was dewormed an average of 1.25 times. Twenty-seven percent (n=22) of the lambs did not

require any treatment for internal parasites; 42% (n=35) were dewormed once. Seventeen percent (n=14) of the lambs needed to be dewormed twice. Only fourteen percent (n=12) of the lambs had to be dewormed three or more times. One lamb died during the experiment. It had scored 3 on the FAMACHA© scale and been dewormed with ivermectin, but it died before its next eye check. Another lamb that had scored 3 and been treated with ivermectin had been found looking sickly. It had a FAMACHA© score of 5 and was treated with Levamisole. It survived. After the death of the other lamb, any lamb requiring anthelmintic treatment was dosed with either Levamisole (Prohibit©) or Moxidectin (Cydectin®). According to Dr. Niki Whitley, ivermectin has been ineffective when administered to lambs and goats at UMES.

# lambs	# dewormings
22	0
35	1
14	2
6	3
4	4
1	5
1	6

The test ended on September 30, as the lack of rain-fall in August and September had depleted the forage base. For the last week of so of the study, large round bales of grass hay were brought in for the lambs.

Conclusion. The FAMACHA© system proved to be an effective management tool for controlling internal parasites in grazing lambs. The same study will be repeated next year with meat goats participating in the pasture performance test (described earlier in the newsletter).

Probiotics Fail to Improve Feedlot Performance in Meat Goats

The University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) conducted an experiment using 24 Boer crossbred wethers to determine the effect of probiotics³ on goats fed feedlot diets. The goats, previously weaned onto pasture, were placed into a feedlot, where they were given free access to a 15% CP pelleted diet. They averaged 47.3 lbs and were divided into two treatment groups based on birth weight, birth type, and sire breed (Boer or Kiko). There were three goats per pen and four pens per treatment. After a 15-day adjustment period, half of the goats were supplemented with probiotics; the other half were supplemented with wheat middlings, which served as a control diet. The study lasted 56 days. The goats were weighed every 14 days. They were slaughtered at the end of the test and carcass data was collected.

Average daily gain (ADG) was similar for both groups of goats and averaged 0.264 lbs. per head per day. Ending weights were not influenced by treatment. At the end of the test, the goats averaged 59.6 lbs. Feed intake and feed efficiency were also not affected by treatment either. Intake averaged 2 lbs. per day, while feed efficiency averaged 7.7 lbs. of feed per lb. of gain. Carcass traits (cold carcass weight, loin eye area, carcass length, and leg

circumference) were also not affected by probiotic treatment.

³Probiotics are cultures of beneficial microorganisms fed to livestock to improve digestion and health.

Tail Docks: A Candid Discussion on the Tail Docking Controversy

by Marie S. Buglin DVM¹

As a commercial lamb producer and a veterinarian, this huge controversy springing up all over the country on tail length was a real puzzlement to me. Why in the world would normal, intelligent livestock breeders can get so riled up over an inch or less of tail on a lamb? Then, I went to a local meeting of “Club Lamb” producers at the District Extension office. Whew!! I felt like I was lucky to leave there alive.

The consensus of the show lamb group seemed to be that there was no justification for the association of “short” or no tails to rectal prolapses. The chorus of comments backing up the consensus was 1) They had always docked their tail “short” and had never or seldom seen a prolapse, or 2) Yes, they did have prolapses in their lambs, but the long tailed lambs prolapsed just as often as the no tail lambs, and furthermore, 3) There was no proof that the lack of tail caused prolapses.

Unfortunately, there just was no way to get a word in edgewise. But, if I had been given a chance to talk, I would have told them what I am going to tell you. (One nice thing about writing, you get to have your say!)

Rectal prolapses have several contributing factors: sex, genetics, straining, and finally, tail length. Sex affects prolapsing because females lay down more internal fat, particularly in the pelvis. Fat is not a strong tissue and tears very easily. When a lamb strains or coughs, fat can't hold the rectal tissue and hind gut in place. Thus, most prolapsing lambs regardless of other factors are females.

There is definitely a genetic component to many prolapses. Years ago, I made the mistake of breeding a sire to his daughters. All of the resulting females prolapsed, either in the feedlot or when they lambed. I even had a few

males prolapse. It didn't matter if their tails were as long as pump handles. If a lamb is genetically predisposed to prolapse, the ligaments and internal structures are not strong enough to hold intestines in place in the pelvic area. If straining occurs, the lamb will prolapse, particularly if it is a female, but occasional males will prolapse also.

I guess straining is the "environmental" factor that club lamb producers kept bringing up – some factor out of everybody's control. Coughing due to dust could maybe fall into that category. But there are all sorts of coughing: summer cough, barn cough, viral cough, whatever it is called in your part of the country. It certainly does contribute to prolapsing. No, I don't know the cause or a cure, although, I'm certain it is infectious and eventually herd immunities do get built up. However, in genetically predisposed lambs, it guarantees prolapsing; again females affected more often than males. However, I have a hard time calling an infectious problem an environmental factor and very often with a little thought it can be dealt with. Coccidia is another problem contributing to straining that I would label infectious, not environmental. This one can be prevented with coccidiostats (Deccox®, Bovatec®) in the feed or salt.

So, now we are back to tail docks! Why would a short tail dock lead to prolapsing? Because the muscle that tightens the anal sphincter inserts on the first four or five coccygeal (tail) vertebrae. When they are removed, the muscles have nothing to hold or pull against. So, when pressure in the abdomen rises and everything is pushed back, the pelvic contents get the big squeeze. If there is a weakness back there, 1) the connective tissue give way, and 2) there is no strength to the anal sphincter to hold things in, so the pelvic organs (i.e. distal intestines and rectum, vagina in pregnant females) get pushed out.

Can we prove this? This is the other criticism leveled against the position taken by many state and county livestock fairs. Well, now that the pedal is against the metal, extension educators are very busy collecting data to do just that. However, it's sort of like proving the sun comes up in the East. When you see it happen every day, why do we have to measure the tails, count the prolapses, and publish the data? The owners and managers of every large

lamb feedlot in the United States have seen it day in and day out. Ask any of them. You don't have to publish an article in a scientific journal for them. Harper Feedlot in Colorado won't buy any 4-H, FFA, or Club lambs. Why? Because they have a high incidence of prolapses (as high as 10-20%) in those lambs. They have 1-3% in their other lambs. Big feedlots don't have the time to find, isolate, and treat them. So, after 2 or 3 days, the lamb finally prolapses its entire intestinal tract out of the rectum, goes into shock and dies. Not a pretty site, although one of those things PETA² would love to publicize.

M & M Sheep, a small feedlot in Weiser, Idaho, that does buy fair lambs at a significant discount, stop what they are doing, grab those lambs that prolapse, transport them clear to Boise (at least 1 ½ hours away when the traffic is good), and sell them to a small meat packing house for an even bigger discount. They tell me it is worth it because they don't have to see them die, and the lamb isn't a total loss. But, I wonder if they put the pencil to the paper whether they wouldn't be ahead not to buy fair lambs.

Actually, there is one published paper by Thomas et al on the length of docked tails and incidence of rectal prolapse in lambs. It was a multi-state cooperative study involving 1,227 lambs within 30 groups, composed of anywhere from 5 to 93 lambs. Three lengths of tail were studied: short, removed as close to the body as possible without surgery; medium, the tail was removed at a location midway between the attachment of the tail and the attachment of the caudal tail folds; and long, the tail was removed at the attachment of the caudal tail folds. Short-docked lambs had an overall 7.8% incidence of rectal prolapses while long tailed lambs had an incidence of 1.8%. The medium group was in the middle (surprise), with 4.0%. One short-tailed group had an incidence of 30% and 3 had a 16-17% incidence. The highest incidence in the long tailed group was 6.7%, while many groups had none. Hampshire crosses had the most, Dorper crosses had none, and of course most prolapsing lambs were female.

The next question that came up was: "why was the Fair Sales Committee" selling these perfectly finished lambs to a feed lot," another emotional issue brought up by the club lamb

producers. Didn't everyone know the lambs were ready for immediate slaughter?

There are at least three reasons! 1) The trend now is to slick shear show lambs. (I personally think we should do that for breeding stock and leave some wool on the market lambs.) With no wool, there is no pelt credit. The pelt credit is pretty good right now – \$9 or so. It is definitely in the economic interest of the fair lamb buyer to keep them until they have a salvageable pelt, approximately 45-50 days. 2) Most fair and show lambs are not fat enough. All the hullabaloo about fat concerns the fat on the slaughter carcass. Market lambs generally have a long ride on the truck before they reach slaughter. They are often taken off feed for 12 hours before they get on the truck and if they are to be slaughtered within 24 hours, they get no feed after they get off the truck. Two millimeters of back fat, supposedly the ideal, melts away to nothing during and after transportation.

Then, finally (3) one fair usually doesn't have the 440 lambs it takes to make a truck-load and no one wants to pay the diesel bill for a half loaded truck. The issue that really fired everyone up was the 0.7 in. inch rule that one of our fairs insisted on this year. How does a producer know how long to dock the tail at birth so it is at least 0.7 in. of an inch at market time? What if they cut it at exactly the recommended end of the web and it turns out to be 0.6 in. when the 4-Her goes to sell? "So what is wrong about leaving the tail a wee bit longer just for insurance?" was my simple minded question.

Club lambs are different, was the answer. They are born and bred to be show lambs not *feedlot lambs* (The *italicized* words are mine.) They are to be long, lean, and muscular. They are the best of the best. They will dress out 60%. They are to be clean, neat, trim with no unsightly bump on their nicely rounded rumps. In other words, the reason for no tail is totally aesthetic. The fact that no tails or extremely short tails increases the risk of pain and suffering by a substantial number of the animals is of no interest to these niche breeders and to justify their stance, they refuse to believe the reports of long time feed lot owners and managers or even, it seems of Extension Service researchers. Unfortunately, they are not an island onto themselves. They impact our indus-

try because they have to enter the regular market channels. Docking tails was a practice begun to keep lambs manure and maggot free, but taken too far, causes a serious health problem.

At this point, I believe all of the industry needs to quit looking the other way while the war wages. But, the part of the industry best able to aggressively address this problem is the purebred industry. It started in the show ring and it has to end in the show ring. If our judges are not good enough to be able to see beyond an inch of tail to a good muscled hind-quarter, how can they tell an excellent sheep from a mediocre one? Judging needs to be judging on the merits of an animal, not its tail length! Show ring and sale promoters need to get involved and insist on some sort of tail on show sheep. Be good examples to the club lamb industry. Remember sheep breeders, the life of a lamb does not usually end when it leaves our hands. It would be nice to ensure that it lives out its life as comfortable as possible.

¹Marie Bulgin is a Sheep Specialist with the University of Idaho. She is the Coordinator of the Caine Veterinary Teaching Center in Caldwell, Idaho.

Editor's note: Veterinarians with the Maryland Department of Agriculture have seen significantly fewer prolapsed lambs at Maryland shows and fairs since the 4-H tail docking policy was implemented.

Calendar of Events

March 10

Forum for Rural Innovation

Winchester, Virginia

Info: (703) 777-0426 or www.LoudounFarms.org

March 17-18, April 1

Beginning and Advanced Shearing Schools

Westminster, Maryland. Info: David Greene at (410)

329-6241 or greelamb@bcpl.net

March 25

Rural Enterprise Conference

Garrett College, McHenry, MD.

Info: Willie Lantz at (301) 334-6960 or wlantz@umd.edu

April 10 and 25

Sheep and Goat Enterprise Development 101
Frederick County Extension Office, Frederick, MD
Info: Terry Poole at (301) 694-1594 x13577 or
tepoole@umd.edu

April 29

Goat and Sheep Auction
University of Maryland Eastern Shore
Princess Anne, MD, Info: Dr. Niki Whitley at (410)
651-6194 or nwhitley@umes.edu.

April 29

Meat Goat Nutrition Workshop
Animal Evaluation Center, Rock Springs, PA (near
State College). Info: Gene Schurman at (724) 465-
3880 or exs10@psu.edu

May 6-7

Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival
Howard County Fairgrounds, West Friendship, MD
Info: www.sheepandwool.org



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