

# 2005 Hair Sheep Workshop @ Virginia State University

## Marketing of Hair Sheep and Hair Sheep Products

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Hair sheep numbers in the United States have increased dramatically in the past fifteen years as documented by breed registry data. Two hair sheep breeds rank among the top six breeds for numbers of sheep registered in the USA from 2002-2004 and one since the year 2000 (**TABLE 1**). The increase in hair sheep registrations occurred while the vast majority of wool sheep registries experienced declines of 25 to 75% in their registration numbers from 1990 to 2004. Accurate numbers for commercial and registered hair sheep are unavailable due to the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) not differentiating between hair and wool sheep production. (Note: in 2007, the NASS census will identify hair sheep operations separate from wool sheep).

Numbers of registered sheep are an indirect measure of hair sheep numbers, but currently are the best available indication of how many hair sheep there are, their rate of increase and their distribution in the USA. Since hair sheep are less likely to be in the show ring than many wool breeds, the numbers of registered hair sheep are not being driven by markets for club or show lambs, as is suggested for wool sheep. Hair sheep breeders are localized in the Southeastern, Midwest, and Texas regions and are low in numbers in the states noted for wool sheep (ID, NV, MT, WY, UT, AZ, NM).

This is particularly significant for the census of hair sheep numbers since much of their growth has occurred in the southeastern states that are not traditional sheep production areas and therefore, not as adequately surveyed. For example, the numbers of Suffolks registered in the USA is over three times that of the Katahdin in 2004. But in eight southeastern states, the numbers of Katahdin hair sheep registered are ten times greater than Suffolk registrations (**Table 3**). Currently, hair sheep are being raised in areas that are not typically associated with wool sheep production (**Tables 2, 3**). Since hair sheep in the USA are derived from genetics adapted to heat and humidity, this distribution is not surprising.

**Table 2. Percentage of Registered Hair Sheep Breeders in each American Sheep Industry Association (ASI) Region in May 2005**

Breed	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	Total No. Breeders
Barbados Blackbelly	3	5	5	11	10	21	5	10	77
Dorper	33	32	32	32	72	66	57	31	398
Katahdin	60	58	59	53	12	3	33	46	413
Royal White	2	2	0	1	4	0	0	0	15
St. Croix	2	3	4	3	2	10	5	12	40
<b>Total No. Hair Sheep Breeders</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>943</b>

Year	Suffolk	Katahdin
2002	87	1,220
2004	97	1,295

States include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina

Region 1 = CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT  
 Region 2 = AL, AR, DE, GA, FL, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA, WV  
 Region 3 = IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI  
 Region 4 = IA, KS, MO, NE, ND, OK, SD  
 Region 5 = TX  
 Region 6 = AZ, CO, NV, NM, UT  
 Region 7 = ID, MT, WY  
 Region 8 = AK, CA, HA, OR, WA

Reasons cited for increase in hair sheep numbers include lack of need for shearing, docking and or crutching, increased resistance to gastro-intestinal parasites, and reproductive efficiency, which all contribute to their use in low-maintenance, easy-care production systems. These contribute to their acceptance in agricultural systems where sheep are used for landscape management, for cattle grazing operations which are looking for easy-care and no-shear sheep to increase efficiency of forage utilization, and movement of sheep production into the southeastern U.S. where gastro-intestinal nematodes limit sheep production. The rise in numbers of hair sheep in the USA occurred with two significant changes in the industry; decreased agricultural price supports for wool production and the increase in available genetics in the USA. Since 1975, both the St Croix and Dorper genetics were imported into North America. The Katahdin, a breed developed in the USA during the 1950's to 1970's, established a Registry in 1985.

**Meat**

Currently, no consistent scientific data documents increased quality, health benefits or public acceptance of hair sheep meat by consumers (Duckett & Greiner, 2005; this volume). Research indicates hair sheep meat quality is good and that meat characteristics fall within the range expected for sheep. Anecdotal and producer-provided evidence that hair sheep meat is milder and has less "muttony taste" is not supported by the limited available scientific studies in controlled taste tests.

Meat marketing potential for hair sheep meat does exist. Two major meat markets that are particularly adapted to hair sheep producers are the Halal (Muslim) markets in major U.S. metropolitan areas and the increasing grass-fed and organic lamb markets. The Halal market often requires lambs be intact males with tail, a 60-90 lb live weight. These criteria are well suited to the ewe efficiency, aseasonal breeding potential, and finished carcass weights of current hair sheep genetics. Hair sheep are typically not tail-docked. The Halal market can be reasonably tracked by looking at numbers of lamb sold at the New Holland (PA) market.

Increasing the above average, but moderate parasite resistance of the medium framed, Katahdin, Dorper and their crosses also provides potential for the developing organic and grass-fed markets in the USA.

Two significant hair sheep meat marketing groups exist, both centered in the southeastern or south central USA. The Scott County Hair Sheep Association in southwestern Virginia with over 200 members and 7,000 ewes has signed a contract to provide lamb to the Food City Supermarket Chain. The Hair Sheep Market Managing Group (HSMMG) incorporated in Arkansas and is centered in Oklahoma and Texas, but has members ranging from Texas to Nebraska to New York. Currently, the group has 50 members and over 10,000 ewes. HSMMG is marketing both meat products and breeding stock and has the potential to collect 60-110 pound lambs and move them between the markets in their extensive geographic areas. Flocks in both of these marketing groups consist mainly of Katahdin or Katahdin x Dorper ewes. A significant

component of the income of both hair sheep marketing groups in 2005 is the high demand for commercial hair sheep breeding stock.

### Leather

Few products are exclusive or unique to hair sheep. The most significant of these is hair sheep leather and its extensive use is largely unrecognized by the sheep industry in the USA. The Texas Hair Sheep Association, an association with commercial producers of all hair sheep breeds, received grants to evaluate quality of USA produced hair sheep leather and documented its superior quality. Actual market data is unavailable, but estimates from Dennis Shelly, Ph.D. of the Texas Leather Institute at Texas Tech are that two leather companies with major USA Department of Defense contracts are importing 250,000 raw hair sheep hides per year to produce gloves, linings of pilot helmets and seat upholstery. Total importation of raw hair sheep hides for the United States leather industry is roughly estimated at close to a 1,000,000 hides for all leather companies. This approaches the 2,500,000 numbers for wool lamb pelts exported from the USA in recent years. If the infrastructure develops for the sale and movement of hair sheep leather hides in the USA, price docks for lack of wool pelt may end for hair sheep meat producers. Also, decreasing the disease potential of bringing 1,000,000 raw hair sheep hides from Africa is imperative for biosecurity of the USA agriculture.

Hair sheep leather is prized for strength, elasticity and lack of blemishes caused by wool follicles. Leather from hair sheep has the softness of wool sheep leather, but the strength and elasticity of leather from haired livestock species. Hair sheep leather combines the best attributes of both haired and woolled species.

### Trophy Hunting

A second unique hair sheep market uses horned hair sheep genetics in the trophy hunting markets. Texas. Thompson Temple, the marketer who started the hair sheep trophy ram book, estimates that 15,000-20,000 4 yr old plus rams priced at \$350-\$500 a head average sell each year. This agri-tourism business is grossing \$5,000,000 to \$10,000,000 per year just in animal sales and not including hunting fees, outfitting and other incomes for the producer. Sheep in these estimates include only the different color/horn breed types derived from the Blackbelly x Mouflon (x Rambouillet) cross. Some fixing of hair color and horn type has taken place and identified types include Texas Dall, American Blackbelly, Corsican, Painted Desert Sheep, and Black Hawaiian.

Figure 3



### **Vegetation and Pest Insect Control**

Increased use of sheep to manage pest plant and insect species is particularly well suited to hair sheep as contamination of wool by vegetable matter decreases value of the clip.

Data provided by Dr. Pat Hatfield of Montana State University indicates that grazing sheep can provide substantial control of sawfly in wheat (**Figure 3**) and alfalfa weevil (data not shown). Of particular interest is the short term grazing of alfalfa by sheep which resulted in significant decrease in weevils with no decrease in alfalfa yield. Sheep and goats are being used around the USA for control of pest plants such as kudzu, brush, spotted knapweed and leafy spurge. In areas where herbicides are not an option, easy care hair sheep can function well.

### **Breeding Stock**

We predict that demand for hair sheep breeding stock in the USA will continue to increase as wool prices remain low, numbers of shearers decrease, and demand for 70-90 pound lamb for al halal slaughter increases or remains steady. Global trends for agricultural production are following the trend of the manufacturing sector and labor intensive agricultural production is moving over seas. Coupled with the movement of soybean production to South America, meat production in the future USA may be based on extensive forage and landscape management requiring easy care sheep genetics provided by hair sheep.