

Report on the 2010 Howard Wyman Sheep Leadership School

Submitted by Ron Cole

The 2010 Leadership School participants came from a wide variety of sheep locations —east coast to west coast, southern states to northern states— to attend the 2010 Howard Wyman Sheep Industry Leadership School sponsored by the National Lamb Feeders Association. The 2010 Leadership School was held on the Ohio State University Campus, July 10-14. The participants were indeed a very diverse group — some focused on ethnic lamb production, while others fed out their own lambs and marketed via value-added programs. Also included were several hair sheep producers looking for ways to market their lambs into growing ethnic markets in their local area, but had been challenged by the diverse ethnic population. A few focused on club lamb production, while others were into producing fibers for hand spinners and yarn enthusiasts. Regardless of their operation type or focus within the industry, all were in for some challenging information during the course of the Leadership School on meeting their customer's needs in the future.

Roger High was the coordinator of the 2010 Leadership School, as well as the Ohio Sheep Improvement Association special information day, which focused on genetic improvements within the sheep industry. Students had the opportunity to participate in the Ohio Sheep Day and ASI Regional Genetics Conference at Riverwood Farms on July 10-11. Dr. David Thomas, University of Wisconsin, discussed selection using specific genetic traits and crossbreeding systems within the sheep industry, needed to maximize production and marketing goals. Dr. Kreg Leymaster, USMARC, Clay Center, NE, followed up with a discussion of various ewe breeds and their contribution to an assortment of sheep management and marketing systems. EPD's were discussed by Dr. David Notter, US Experiment Station, Dubois, ID. He discussed genetic traits and how their significance could be utilized in sheep breeding programs.

Following these discussions, each person had the opportunity to select white face and black face rams for specific breeding programs using visual appraisal. Then, selection was done using available EPD data on each animal. What a difference in how rams were selected when more information was available to the buyer! The day's program concluded with a panel discussion by the three speakers on a variety of topics and many, many questions from the audience concerning genetics.

The Ohio State University 509 Lamb evaluation program got underway on Sunday afternoon, July 11, by having participants evaluate live lambs using value determining factors. Following the instruction of Dr. Paul Kuber, OSU staff, we became more familiar with value determining characteristics of lamb. The groups were given grid pricing formulas and expected to determine the value of each lamb prior to the auction. Their role was to be a packer/processor, to purchase their supply needs and then merchandise their product, at a profit. After each group had purchased their lamb, ultra sound technology was demonstrated, estimating both muscle and fat components in all the lambs. Following dinner, each group worked on their challenging study questions in

preparation for their presentation on Wednesday morning, July 14th. Group presentations allowed members to fully interact with each other, each having input on the project.

Early Monday, July 12, started with the harvesting of the lambs and the group learning about USDA Inspection procedures. Then, on the bus for a tour of the Ohio countryside and several stops related to sheep production. First stop was the Blystone Farm, a local farm supplying sheep meat to ethnic customers in the metropolitan Columbus area. Customers have the unique opportunity not only to select the type of lamb or ewe for their religious needs, but also to observe and participate in the harvest of the animal. Animals were harvested according to strict ethnic directions of the customer. Several diverse ethnic groups were represented and on farm workers were very well versed in those ethnic customs and languages necessary to conduct business with their clients.

Next stop was the Mid States Wool Warehouse, Canal Winchester, where it was demonstrated how wools are graded into “lines of similar wools” prior to being made into large warehouse bales and marketed to a variety of buyers. As corn, soybean, and hay fields were passed, we realized how fortunate Ohio was in regard to weather this year, as all was very green. Some years, they are feeding hay in July!

Third stop was at a family sheep operation using 300 ewes to harvest forage on the farm. Using intensive grazing techniques, this family purchases very little outside feed, composts virtually everything possible from the farm and uses the latest in fencing techniques to assist in farm grazing. We enjoyed a wonderful lunch in the shade, visiting with the owners and friends about sheep production in Ohio.

A large Ohio lamb feedlot, housed in former turkey facilities, was the next stop in the day. Using many management skills from the former turkey operation, this father/son team was finishing several thousand lambs several times a year for an upscale meat processor and distributor in the Pennsylvania area. Lambs were priced on a value-added basis to maintain consistency, and profitability, from both the feedlot and processing facility, to the consumer. Lambs come from as far away as South Dakota, Wyoming and even California, to provide a steady supply to the processor all year round. Finally, we visited two brothers and their families, who have created a well-known club lamb production system in Ohio providing lambs and replacement ewes to 4-H and FFA members across the state. When the day was done, we had seen a diverse view of sheep operations in Ohio, each one unique and different from the others, yet all very successful in their own right.

On Tuesday, July 13, the enthusiasm was especially high as each group was anxious to start processing their lamb. Under the guidance of Dr. Henry Zerby, the Leadership School participants were constantly entertained, as well as educated about lamb processing and marketing. We learned how to evaluate lamb carcasses via the USDA Quality and Yield Grade parameters. Then, on to safety lessons required for carcass fabrication, as each person was issued safety equipment and knives for processing their lamb. While some of the groups processed their lamb into retail cuts, others were

further processing lamb into lunch and dinner items: brats, lamb Jalapeño poppers, and many other value-added products utilizing lamb. Paul Kuber, with the assistance of several graduate students, taught us about dry rubs, wet rubs, injecting meat products, all in an attempt to better utilize each muscle group for best tenderness and flavor possible.

As each lamb was processed, under Dr. Zerby's expertise, retail cuts were identified, weighed and priced, so that a total value could be placed on each lamb after processing to see which group made the most profit on the lamb they purchased— just like a packer/processor does on a daily basis. Dinner concluded a long but rewarding day in the meats lab.

On the final day, each group completed and presented their comments on the group project before leaving for home. Group presentations allowed for excellent group interaction on a common topic, with many utilizing their laptops to complete their PowerPoint presentations.

Regardless of the type of sheep operation, area of the country, or focus of production, students all agreed the Leadership School was a total success. They had a unique opportunity that most producers do not experience — to receive a broad-based view of the lamb production system from farm to consumer, from experts in the field who work with lamb and meat products every day. The participants also made new friends from across the U.S., acquired new resource materials that will benefit every phase of the sheep industry, and experienced a multitude of different lamb recipes, many of which they made themselves!

The 2011 Howard Wyman Sheep Industry Leadership School will be held in Sioux Falls, South Dakota with a focus on ewe-lamb production, lamb feeding and lamb processing in the Mid-western states. Mark your calendars for July 10-13, 2011 and submit your application to the NLFA office by May 2, 2011.