

St. Croix
Hair Sheep
Breeders,
Inc.



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www.stcroixsheep.org

News & Views

PRESIDENT'S RAMBLE



Well, it's that time of year for many folks. You know the four seasons of the year, don't you? Winter, Spring, Summer and Football! Not that I am a big fan or an active participant in the deal but I do know that football is a game of teamwork. What does a winning football team or any sort of winning team need to be successful or even make Number 1?

- *Dominance of actions and efforts. Remember "dominant".*
- *Consistent and predictable execution by each member. Remember "prepotent".*

So what does that have to do with sheep, specifically St. Croix?

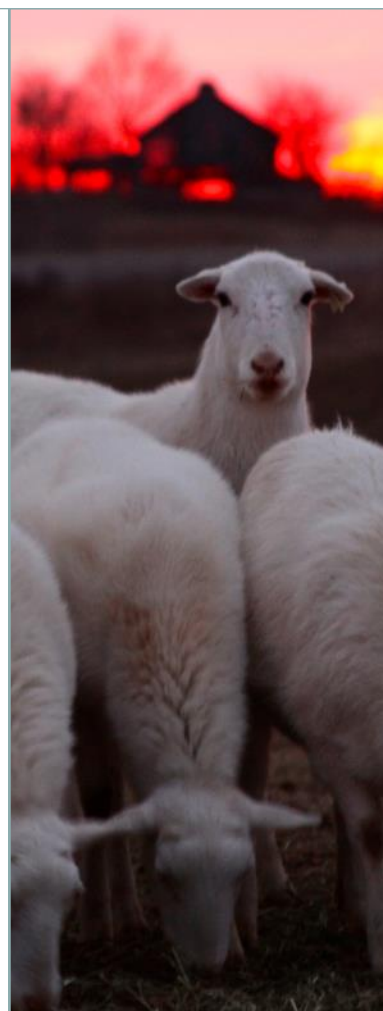
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LITTLE HELPERS

I don't know if it was the weather this year; above average rains and cooler temps, or perhaps just me not being as observant, but I went through the summer thinking, "I haven't seen as many flies this year". Noticeably, the cattle were much less affected, and I had no cases of pinkeye.

As I clip the top of pastures, every year I notice that the tractor and bush hog seem to make a flock of birds materialize out of nowhere, swarming in and dive-bombing around them, feasting on the bugs that the cutting process flushes out of harm's way

(Continued on page 6)



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

President's Ramble	1
Little Helpers	1
Milking St. Croix	3
I Want it Right Now!	6
Just a Bend in the Road	7
Treasurer's Report	10

NEWS & VIEWS

News & Views is the membership news letter of the SCHSB, published three times per year.

If you are not a member and are interested in becoming one, please contact us using the information on the back cover.

HAPPY READING!

PRESIDENT'S RAMBLE...

(Continued from page 1)

Well, it has to do with what we cannot see or fully comprehend alone. **It's the genetics that are the players in our efforts** that make us winners, losers or just end a season at 5-5-0. Let's talk some basic skills and move up toward discussions of the first string and the season's expectations for a chance at the trophy.

How do we select sheep as breeders or to "be on our team"? Here are some options:

- *Based on type or individuality*
- *Based on pedigree*
- *Based on show ring acceptance*
- *Based on performance testing*
- *Based on progeny testing*
- *Based on production testing*

A sheep based on show ring performance appeals to some that specifically like to show sheep. Or we hope the show ring accomplishments and accolades of the judges will allow recognition of the breed, farm, ranch, animal quality for a better future.

A sheep based on performance testing is a sheep that has most likely been compared to some other sheep for something or there is some data on the individual. Mama Ewe 001 has twinned 3 of the last 4 lambings, Lil' Ram 123 has worse hair than his sibs, Big Daddy 1492 weighed more at yearling than some other yearling rams we owned at that same time, etc. Please note: You know individual specifics but you do not know if the things that you like or dislike can be or will be transmitted to the offspring when you use this sheep as a breeder.

"A sheep based on production testing is the apex (having) accurate records rather than casual observations."

Let's briefly deal with each of these options.

A sheep based on type or individuality is a "stand alone". No other information available/helpful You assess the sheep as what you see or feel. "What you see is what you get!" Things get mentally processed like too tall, too short, crooked legs, thin muscled, looks like a real ram etc. You're not familiar with parents or pedigree, might not see papers.

A sheep based on pedigree is a sheep that you might or might not see but you know the ancestors or focus on ancestors. You might be looking for an outcross sire in general or want great milking ewes and heard that Big Ram 1999 was the greatest of rams 18 years ago for siring great ewes and this is a direct decedent.

A sheep based on progeny testing is a proven breeder and the offspring (progeny) have been tested for something or you can see them. You know what this parent can (or cannot) deliver in terms of transmitting traits and type to their offspring but, you do not know anything more about this sheep other than the offspring's quality.

A sheep based on production testing is the apex for us in this article. It is a sheep that we either consider, own or like **because of accurate records rather than casual observations**. This sheep brings to the sales counter or the breeding pen as much data as we can get, hopefully. It would have been se-

(Continued on page 4)

MILKING ST. CROIX AT BLONDE DOG FARM

Early March I finally added 2 pregnant St. Croix ewes to our farm, an aspiration of mine for several years. While I was eager to finally have home grown lamb for our family, I was also excited to begin my venture into milking sheep. New to the dairy world with no experience milking anything, let alone my rather skittish ewes, this would prove to be somewhat of an adventure.

My first ewe, Riddles, lambled for the first time late March. I left her ram lamb with



Riddles ram lamb

her for 2 weeks, then began separating him at night so I could milk in the morning. Riddles does not walk on a lead well and I didn't have a stand at that time so she was just tied to the fence for morning milking's. When I started I was hand milking, which was quite difficult due to her small teat size, my fairly large hands and my complete lack of coordination/experience. (Much to my disappointment, hand milking did not come naturally.) Considering she hadn't been handled much and I didn't know what I was doing, our first time went fairly well. There was quite a bit of leaping about, pushing me over, some moderate kicking on her part and much bumbling on my part. Most of the milk was sprayed all over my shoes, or my arm, or pretty much anywhere besides the mason jar I was using for collection and it took me almost an hour before we were done.

We were both pretty frustrated at the end of the first day, but I was determined to keep going and made biscuits with the milk to reinforce that this was helping feed my family. The following day was a hot mess, there was not going to be any zen or peace in the milking parlor and I finally just put her back because I was envisioning her as lamb chops or a nice roast. The 3rd day I was starting to develop rhythm and found if I knelt and used my body to keep her against the fence she relaxed a bit and stopped kicking. It still took me nearly 45 minutes and was not a ton of fun for either of us and a bit hard on my body. Riddles still had no interest in grain or treats during milking.

“Most of the milk was sprayed all over my shoes, ... or pretty much anywhere besides the mason jar I was using ...”

After about a week I was getting tired of hand milking. I wasn't getting much better, it took forever and time is precious in my mornings with already a lot to do before adding this new chore. While I also had a goat getting ready to kid in a couple weeks, I didn't want to spend a lot of money on an automatic milker the first year due to cost needing to ensure that I enjoyed this new hobby before dumping a ton of money into it. So, I began researching cheap homemade milking machines and found an example of one made from a mason jar, plastic tubing and a brake bleeder pump. Sound the sweet bells of relief! While there are a couple places online that you can purchase such a

(Continued on page 5)

PRESIDENT'S RAMBLE...

(Continued from page 2)

lected on correct type, have a known and impressive (desirable) pedigree, have had some level of individual performance testing, offspring would have been seen or tested to allow us to know progeny results and we then make decisions **because of accurate records rather than casual observations** .

Back to the analogy of the gridiron: What are some basics to use to build a winning team of sheep? Minimum selection criteria should be something that we can quote verbatim at the start of any buying effort: What will give us a winning season and build a program for us? I think it is going to be sheep that are selected for (not all inclusive):

- *Environmental fit*
- *Proper conformation*
- *Profitable sales potential*
- *Uniformity*
- *Good health and free of known disease, including resistance to internal parasites*
- *Multiple births*
- *Adequate rate of gain or proper size for age*
- *Freedom from abnormalities and defects*
- *Matches to the breed type and flock goals*
- *Udder soundness*
- *Easy keeping*
- *Appropriate price for given quality*

WOW! How do we get this, think it through, make the right selections and make it happen? I just looked at the list again and I have a headache! I can give a simple and small answer to our success, just like an iceberg is only seen by the tiny tip above the water.

We need :

- *A record keeping system that is uniform across the board to compare sheep to sheep and building from generation to generation under similar conditions (environment). But not “just compare”, the system **MUST** process, sort, compile and present data to you so that you, me and John Smith (potential buyer) can easily understand what has been collected and make data driven decisions i.e. useful and sortable data but no headache!*
- *Individual sheep and flocks that have been built on genetics for generations that allow high levels of the transmission of good traits to most of the offspring and breeders that have been culled, selected and bred to have eliminated known bad traits.*

“Going for the W”, the unseen and the key to win or loss are the genes of the breeder animals: those genes that are both dominate and prepotent. Genes which are dominate over other genes just like a team wins on the field by dominating both offensively and defensively. And genes that are stacked or selected to be prepotent: you want most or all offspring to be the same, peas in a pod, useful and good. Just like you hope that every play is run flawlessly, and if needed, the second and third string sitting on the bench provide depth and can come in and play to win.

We're in the 4th quarter, time is ebbing, the game is tied, we've eaten enough hot dogs and junk food for a month and what do we think? GO-O-O-O Sheep! Rah, Rah, Sheep, hit him in the _____ (BEEP)! What will it take to win this one for the St. Croix breed?

A uniform record keeping system for each and every flock in the breed.

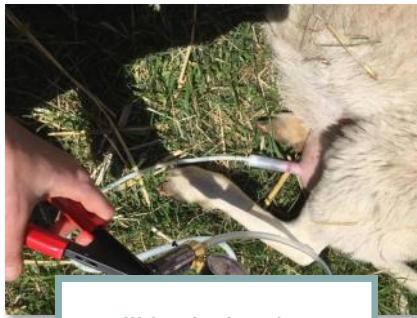
(Continued on page 11)

MILKING ST. CROIX AT BLONDE DOG FARM...

(Continued from page 3)

milker, I was not perfectly happy with any of the models thinking I could perhaps make one cheaper. After several “revamps” and tinkering, I had a milk machine that worked great for both my sheep and goat with just a teat cup adaptation for each species. Plus I wasn’t getting hair and other material’s in the milk like I had been with hand milking.

Riddles took to the hand-pump milking machine much better. (I don’t blame her. I can’t imagine my fumbling was very comfortable!) It decreased our time to about 10 minutes milking per side. Instead of dreading going out and milking, it was a morning chore that I started to look forward to. Riddles still never really came around to enjoying the process, but the neighbors weren’t getting a Circ du Soleil showing either. She would give me 10-16oz per day so not really



Milking laying down

worth it when hand milking for 45 minutes but rewarding using the milk machine.

Puzzle lambled a couple weeks ago. At 2 years old, this is her second lambing and she is my somewhat nutty ninja sheep. If she can’t jump or run away, her defense mechanism is to lay down. Super strange and frustrating when you are trying to milk! I tried for a couple days to use Puzzle as a milk sheep, even milking her laying down be-

cause no matter what, she just would not stand. It was ridiculous, a little funny and very irritating. (I am pretty sure my neighbors think I am crazy.) With no time for Puzzle-level drama in my morning, especially now with a goat to milk as well, Puzzle has been “retired” from the milk string and will just raise tasty lambs for our freezer.

Compared to dairy breed ewes (East Friesian, Lacaune, etc), the output from our St. Croix ewes is much less. However as part of Blonde Dog Farm (our little slice of heaven), Riddle’s production alone negated the need for me to purchase milk for our family of two all the while raising a lamb that will end up nourishing our family down the road. Both Puzzle and Riddles lambled easily, have not needed much maintenance thus a huge perk for our busy lifestyle. They have been a great multipurpose sheep, producing delicious milk great for drinking, baking or making cheese (still on our “to do” list). Not tried milking your St. Croix? TRY it!

Hand-made Mason Jar Milking Machine list of materials:

- *Wide Mouth Mason Jar: a quart jar for 1 sheep, half gallon for multiple.*
- *Food Grade Silicone Sealant*
- *Tattler Wide Mouth Lids with Rubber Rings: I found the rigidity of the Tattler lids just right. Metal ones did not work as well.*
- *Wide Mouth Canning Rings, to hold on the Tattler lids.*
- *Plastic Tubing: I used 1/4” food grade plastic tubing, 2 sets about 5 feet in length each. I imagine silicone would also work well.*
- *2 - 1/4” x 3/8” Plastic 90 Degree Barbs*
- *1 - 12ml Curved Tip Syringe: Cut the first 1/2” of the tip off so tubing will fit on. A 12ml catheter tip syringe*

(Continued on page 10)

LITTLE HELPERS...

(Continued from page 1)

and into the air. They have come to realize it is easy pickings and a bug buffet!

This year though, I noticed something else, the birds (swallows) seemed oblivious to the livestock, or perhaps rather the sheep were oblivious to the birds. Regularly, of late, I can look out and see any number of sheep with free-loading birds just parked on their backs, heads, etc.



I have seen the same thing this year in the cattle herd. I suspect, to some extent, these “little helpers” have made a difference in my fly population.



Sometimes it is the little things that make a difference and the little things that one is often too busy to notice.

Matt

I WANT IT RIGHT NOW!

I want sheep that _____ ASAP. Ever say that? We have all thought it. How do we make better sheep? You have to know the system and the hurdles. What hurdles? The big one is Percent Heritability of a characteristic or trait. Each one has been researched and documented. The higher the % the easier it is to change the type or performance of our lambs. Let's get some numbers here to talk about.

<u>Characteristic/Trait</u>	<u>Average % Heritability*</u>
Twinning/multiple births	12
Birth weight	30
Weaning weight (60 days)	10
Post weaning daily gain	71
Post weaning efficiency	15
Yearling weight	40
Mature body weight	40
Loin eye area	53
Carcass weight/day of age	22

**from various sources*

There are ranges for each trait depending on the individual sheep. Don't bet the farm just yet on an unproven breeder. A lot of this runs together in thoughts but why would a particular sheep have an above average % heritability compared to the average number in the given table? The answer comes from this issue's lead-in article: dominance and prepotency of his/her genes. Today, let's deal with average for our learning.

What do these numbers tell us in general? The larger the number, on average, the easier and quicker we can change that trait by our selection of breeders.

What are some general “take aways” at a glance? Except for birth weight, the traits

(Continued on page 9)

JUST A BEND IN THE ROAD

My wife, Brooke, and I purchased our small 21 acre farm in October of 2014. The previous owners had let the property grow up and the pasture was covered in trees and brush that were about three to six inches in diameter. We worked to clear the trees and tore down the old fences that had been taken over and planted grass.

In 2015 we found out that we would be having our first child in March of 2016. With the anticipation of having a child and still preparing to start a small farm, I was reminded of the following verse in the Bible, “But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind” (Job 12:7-10). This verse confirmed my desires to have a small farm, as I wanted my son, Silas, to grow up with animals so that he would see first hand, God’s creation and the miracle of birth on a regular basis.

Having grown up raising a few goats and working on my uncle’s dairy farm, I initially thought we would buy goats or cows, but one day Brooke mentioned raising sheep instead. After quite a bit of researching different sheep breeds online, I noticed that Royal White and Katahdin sheep seemed very popular. However, what caught my eye was that they had one undeniable thing in common; both breeds had originated by crossing St. Croix sheep. That’s when the “light bulb” went off for me and I began focusing my research on St. Croix. It didn’t take us long to realize this breed fit us well because of their low maintenance, as I still planned to work a full time job and my wife was now caring for our newborn son. We were



impressed with their superior parasite resistance and lack of foot trimming and wool shearing needs, and decided this would be our breed of choice.

In the spring of 2017 we finished building our fence and we purchased a female llama to use as a guardian. Thirteen days after buying our llama, my wife called me at work ecstatic to tell me our llama had given birth. We were quite shocked, as the gentleman who sold her to us told us that he had purchased it from a registered llama breeder because she wouldn’t breed. On top of that, she was purchased to be a companion for his neutered male llama. Brooke initially named the cria Joy because

(Continued on page 8)

JUST A BEND IN THE ROAD...

(Continued from page 7)

of the joy it brought her when she found it, but we had to change its name to Joey a short time later when we realized it was a male!

After purchasing our guardian, we then bought 5 registered, already exposed, St. Croix ewes from an individual and a registered ram from Eddie Martin. We also bought 8 commercial Katahdin crosses shortly after. Approximately 10 days before our first registered ewe was to give birth she injured her leg and could no longer walk. We were able to save her two lambs when she went into labor, but she had to be euthanized. Our next registered ewe had her single lamb unassisted, but we lost the lamb a couple of days later. We aren't 100% sure what happened, but believe the lamb wasn't getting enough milk from its mother. While I still wonder if I couldn't have prevented the lamb's death, we did not detect the issue until it was too late to save the lamb. Our third registered ewe also gave birth unassisted, but died the following day from unknown complications. We were able to save the lamb, but to say we were disappointed would be an understatement. If there was a silver lining to bottle feeding 3 lambs, it was that our son wasn't sleeping through the night and I didn't need to set an alarm clock to get up and feed them!

As one might imagine, with a 60% failure rate on the first 5 registered ewes we had purchased I was seriously contemplating selling all the sheep and getting cows. Although Eddie Martin didn't sell me the 5 registered ewes, he encouraged me to stick with St. Croix sheep and insisted that I was having an uncommon run of bad luck. Since that time, the remaining two ewes have each given birth to healthy twin lambs and we are pleased with their performance. While we still have a lot to learn and many goals to improve the breed, we are happy to report that our experience was just a bend in the road and not a dead end.

Matthew Mintmier



ARTICLES FROM MEMBERS

SCHSB welcomes member submitted articles. Please feel free to submit and share any interesting tidbits, learning experiences, pearls of wisdom, management philosophies that work for you, etc.

Please send your document with any appropriate high resolution pictures to: secretary@stcroixsheep.org.

By sending us this information, you are acknowledging that the article and images are yours to send and that you approve the use in this publication and on our website.

I WANT IT RIGHT NOW...

(Continued from page 6)

easiest to change are growth and carcass traits. We know from cattle research that often there are genetic links between higher growth and larger birth weights because the lambs are growing in the uterus at a rate that they can exhibit after birth.

Pop Quiz! Which will change the quickest?

- Ewes/ewe lambs selected for twinning
- Ram lambs selected for 60 day weaning weights
- Carcass weight for day of age
- Post weaning daily gain

Answer: Twinning and 60 day weaning weights are heritable at about the same percentage of 10 to 12, fairly low when 88% to 90% is caused by some other factor(s). Option for carcass weight for day of age is 22% heritable so better than first two but nature and other factors still have a 78% effect against our efforts to select breeders with inheritable changes. The answer is d, post weaning daily gain at **71% heritable** with only 29% caused/affected by other reasons.

What can I do with this information? Realizations are to be had from it. If I select both ewes and ewe lambs for twinning and rams and ram lambs for post weaning daily gain, yearling weight and rib eye area year after year, which group will show most progress fastest? The rams. So do not be discouraged if you work and work on twinning rates and they are creeping up. At the same time select rams with adequate muscling and proper growth and you will improve your flock rapidly gaining overall better market lambs and desired breeders.

“But please describe speed and transfer of traits.” OK, your current ewes have been having an average birth weight of 6lbs. You want bigger lambs and you buy a ram from a flock that averages 10lbs on birth weight. This new ram is genetically stable and able to transmit genes for 10lb lambs that he sires. How much difference should you expect on average for his lambs? The difference in birth weights in this example is 4lbs. So we crank out an average change: $6\text{lbs} + (4\text{lbs} \times 30\%) = 6 + (4 \times 0.3) = 7.2\text{lbs}$ of expected average lamb birth weight

Summary:

- *Exact % heritability an individual sheep can transmit unknown.*
- *We need data to know our averages*
- *We can expect growth traits to increase rapidly as compared to maternal traits*
- *No change is 100% transmittable*

Words of caution:

- *Easy to get impressed with growth and muscle*
- *Easy to fall into a rut or chase a fad*
- *Linkages in genes that we might or might not know exist e.g. birth weight linked to growth. Over-selection can lead to linked genetic changes that we do not always want or need*
- *SCHSB has a breed standard and a known size of original St. Croix sheep. Don't under select and raise pee-wees and do not over select for growth/mature body weight trying to make St. Croix sheep become Suffolks. Plan to hit the bullseye.*

Eddie

MILKING ST. CROIX AT BLONDE DOG FARM...

(Continued from page 5)

will not work, you need to use the curved tip syringe. Also, if your sheep have larger teats you may need a larger syringe.

- 1 Brake Bleeder Pump

Assembly Instructions:

1. Use a 3/8" spade bit to drill two holes in a Tattle lid.
2. Screw one of the plastic 90 degree barbs into each hole until they sit flush with the lid.
3. Apply a liberal amount of silicone sealant around both the top and the bottom of where the barb intersects with the Tattler lid. This provides a good seal so you don't leak air and lose suction. Allow to completely dry before using (usually a 12-24 hour cure time).
4. Once dry, attach one 5' length of tubing to each 90 degree barb.
5. Attach your curved tip syringe with the tip cut off to the other end of one length of tubing and your brake bleeder to the other set of tubing.
6. Put the rubber Tattler ring on the rim of a clean mason jar then place the Tattler lid on top of the rubber ring and secure in place using a canning band. Make sure

the rubber ring is properly placed. If it isn't you will not have a good seal and won't be able to create suction. If you are milking and notice a loss of suction this is likely the place you need to re-adjust (or reapply silicone around the barb/Tattler lid junction).

7. Use something to carry everything in. (Large Tupperware, bucket, etc. all work fine.) We have settled on an over the fence feeder so we can hang it or place it on the ground.

Now you are ready to start milking! Use your choice of teat wash/cleansing methods prior to applying the syringe to your ewes' teat. Hold syringe in place while pumping the Brake Bleeder pump to create suction. Keep suction between 5-7 psi so you don't damage the teats during milking.

Annie Pulzone



TREASURER'S REPORT

As of 9/5/2017 all bills are paid and we have a balance of \$4837.64.

Billy

PRESIDENT'S RAMBLE...

(Continued from page 4)

Members who take this effort seriously and voluntarily want to participate with their sheep to begin collecting and entering basic data to improve their own flock (help themselves) and support the breed in a new and better way.

That opportunity is almost here! Let's give it another big and bold **“WOW”**. SCHSB is in the beta testing stage of a custom built, online, breed specific, confidential data program that will tie into the registry and help each and every one of us to go where no St. Croix sheep owner has ever gone before. The Board of Directors are trying a test version now, we will provide feedback to the programmer and will present the program when it is ready to go. The entire membership will get instructions and access at that time. It is voluntary, so don't panic. But don't stay status quo and get left behind.

If you think that the online registration, transfer, flock records management and payment options are great (I do!) then “you ain't seen nothin' yet”! So what's that to do with winning football games and better sheep? We'll be able to build a winning team and season based on **accurate records rather than casual observations**. Keeping and looking at computerized records will be easy instead of sorting through gobs of papers (self incriminating). As I have been scolded for saying in the past (I really am glad to folks who read and comment), it will be easier and we'll all be better informed to “Keep the best and eat the rest”!

This is not the end but really a new beginning. This is not erasing the past or forgetting that we want “original St. Croix sheep”. Think about it: St. Croix sheep in 2017 and the future with real data, compared to contemporaries, selected for best traits, breeding better generations based on type, pedigree and production testing and all focused on traits that made the original sheep worthy of consideration as imports and a new breed. We will begin to be able to tell our documented sheep traits to other breeds and interested parties as never before while helping ourselves be better at our own job of breeders, owners and caretakers.

It's 4th and long, ... seconds remaining... no time outs...Let's go out there, TEAM, and “win one for the Gipper”.



Eddie

SCHSB MISSION STATEMENT

Establish a central organization (within the United States) to register, promote, and develop the growth of the St. Croix breed of sheep.

Define the distinguishing characteristics of the breed and establish specific minimum standards for registering individual animals

Insure that individual animals meet specified criteria in order to be registered as members of the St. Croix breed

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ADVERTISING

All N&V publications are emailed to every member on the dates below. You have the option to purchase a mailed copy of N&V (3 editions per year) for \$15 if you prefer.

Publications will be sent on 2/1, 6/1 and 10/1. Cut off dates for articles and ads are: 1/15, 5/15 and 9/15.

The full color ad sizes available for the publication are as follows:

Name,	Size(s),	Single	Year (x3)
Business Card	3.5" x 2"	\$15	\$40
Quarter Page	3.25" x 4.5"	\$30	\$75
Half Page	7" x 4.5" or 3.25" x 9.5"	\$55	\$140
Full Page	7" x 9.5"	\$90	\$240

Please note these prices assume you have acceptable artwork available for publication. If you do not have artwork available one can be created for you for free (business card text format only) or a fee (see below). Artwork should be one of the following formats: jpg, tif, tiff, png, pdf, ai, cdr, doc, docx, pub, eps. Art should either be in vector graphics format or stored with at least 300DPI. The publication is in color and images will be converted to RGB for web publication and CYMK for paper production. There should be no passwords on any files submitted. We do not accept any responsibility for any errors in your artwork. **Scanned ads are not acceptable!**

You have a couple of ways to request ads. You may use the online form available on our website. This is the easiest way as it also allows

you to pay online using check, debit or credit card via Paypal (you do not need to have a Paypal account). The form is located at: <http://stcroixsheep.org/ad-request>. Alternatively you may send an email to ads@stcroixsheep.org with your request and artwork. If your artwork is too big, we have a Dropbox that you can use to upload your file. When you request an ad by email you will need to send a check and will receive a reminder to do so (with the correct address) via email.

Creation of Artwork for Ads

We can prepare your artwork for you for a fee. Artwork for a business card sized ad will be created for **free** if you only want text. There will be no images and we reserve the right to edit your text to fit. You have room for a short phrase or sentence to describe your business along with your farm name, your name and address a phone number and your email. If your text is too long we will edit it as necessary without contacting you.

If you want a business card ad with images or a larger sized ad created, then there will be a one off charge. Just let us know you want artwork created (using the ads@stcroixsheep.org email or [online form](#)) and the editor will contact you to discuss your requirements. The artwork created can be used as many times as necessary without another charge (even in other publications). The additional one off fees are as listed (Prices may vary depending on your requirements with the additional fee being charged separately):

Our editor also provides website creation and hosting for farms and businesses at a reasonable fee. If you have any questions about these services please contact them directly at richard@chventures.com.