

St. Croix
Hair Sheep
Breeders,
Inc.



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www.stcroixsheep.org

News & Views

PRESIDENT'S RAMBLE "MY SHEEP ARE REGISTERED ST. CROIXS"



What does that term, "registered St. Croix sheep", mean? Does this sound like a dumb question? Maybe so. But let's take a look at it anyway. It is important for several reasons. I'll use a bit of research data to kick off our discussion. Let's start with some general research on incorrect parentage in registrations.

Studies show that the parentage error increases as the number of lambs born per ewe increase. In a 2015 research article titled "The power of 28 microsatellite markers for parentage testing in sheep", the average error of parentage was 9, 15 and 24% for singles, twins and triplets, respectively. Sire error was nearly 4%.

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2021 ANNUAL MEETING

Join us Saturday and Sunday, **October 2-3, 2021**, in Salem, IN
For our Annual Meeting.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2021

- 1:00pm Mid-West Hair Sheep Sale
- 6:00 pm Catered Dinner
- 7:00pm Annual Meeting

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2021

- 8:00 am Breakfast

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NEWS & VIEWS

News & Views is the membership newsletter 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)

These were not intentional errors but ewes swapping lambs, rams getting out and many of the things we all face in a short and furious breeding or lambing season. In these cases, if all of your sheep are St. Croix the lambs are all pure St. Croix, but have either been assigned to or raised by the wrong ewe. And then you have the nearly 4% which can sing, "Papa was a rollin' stone"! **They are pure but with incorrect parentage.** UH-OH! And all of us usually have a few that lose tags or ID and we just end up selling them as commercial sheep.

There can be crossbreeding errors due to multiple breeds on the farm. I hope that most are unintended, but I have been told that historically at least one foundation breeder said that he was improving his flock by adding some White Dorper. That is tragic to our small but unique gene pool. A crossed animal will have hybrid vigor and different traits and type which may appear superior and such animals might get wide use because of improved size and growth. **It is the same as lying because a crossed animal is a dilution in the gene pool.** I have been shown recent photos of "St. Croix

"There can be crossbreeding errors due to multiple breeds on the farm"

sheep" (not in SCHSB) and they looked more like Katahdins than they do St. Croix sheep. Some have said that they have seen St. Croix in recent photos (again, not in SCHSB) which seemed to be "Dorper-like". An older cow buddy told me recently that he told an auto mechanic, "You know those used car salesmen that folks know are crooks... they learned

that from cow traders!" In the sheep world, there are unintentional errors and, sadly, intentional errors in pedigree and purity. I'm going to change gears for a paragraph or two but let me leave this with a positive hope and say that there is good news on this subject at the end of this article.

Historic registrations: **the first St. Croix sheep in the US were not registered.** That might sound as dumb as my opening question. The original sheep came largely from three private commercial flocks on the island and were selected only because they were white, polled and were correct in conformation and type. The UVI "Virgin Island Whites" research flock was not started until some years after the imports had been made to the US mainland. The original flock at Utah State University grew in number but they practiced and used a term "multisire" in the early years of their flock records. That means that they recorded the ewe that birthed the lambs, but the ram was any one of the rams in the flock. The lack of ram selection and rotation lead to inbreeding problems. When inbreeding problems started, the data on both sire and dam began to be recorded and additional importations were made.

Not all of the early St. Croix sheep in the US were at USU. Some were at North Carolina State University, University of Florida, Mississippi State and so forth. USDA-ARS eventually had research flocks in AR and in MD. Individuals has private flocks of St. Croix sheep. Dr. Foote, at USU, began to keep a flock book and as the first association started up the sheep from USU or any of these other sources had to be added to the flock book if folks wanted them known as registered sheep. Registration papers were just mimeographed forms on typing paper with data written

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2021 ANNUAL MEETING

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- 8:30am Speaker, Dr. Scott Bowdridge. West Virginia University
- 11:00 am Luncl1
- 11:30 am Break-out Session #1 Beth Johnson. Kentucky State Field Vet, Body
- Condition Scoring and Famacha Certification
- 12:30 pm Break-out Session #2 Donnie Brewer, Brewer Livestock, Market Grading

RSVP to: secretary@stcroixsheep.org

<http://www.washingtoncounty.in.gov/index.php>
<https://www.cityofsalemin.com/index.php/tourism/visitor-s-guide-to-salem>

2021 SCHSB ELECTIONS FOR DIRECTOR

The 2021 elections are approaching! The 2021 nominating committee will be certifying eligibility of candidates who are willing to run for a board position between now and October 10, 2021 (the deadline is 10 days later this year since this is a new process and to accommodate the newsletter publishing date.) Like last year, the elections will be held electronically.

If you are nominating another member, check with them first (always a good idea!) or if you would like to run, please email the SCHSBI secretary at the official email with your intentions. As we mentioned in the June newsletter, the by-laws have been updated to make the elections more open and more efficient. If you are interested, give the elections section of the bylaws a read, and if there are questions, feel free to email or call Lori Marion.



Not ready to be a director? Your volunteer board can always use more folks to help keep projects moving and get work done. Let us know how you are interested in helping.

Lori

THE SUMMER SLUMP

No, it's not how high school students sit in their desks and chairs on the first few dreaded days of school! It's that time of year. Summer to fall. Time for the State Fair. Time to start planning for the holidays. Time to plant the fall garden. Time for the summer slump. **If you are from Florida to Canada your pastures experience summer slump.** Warm season grasses (scientist call them C4s) and many warm season plants, even if they grow well as the days get shorter, contain less food value. It's what an old professor of mine used to call a natural

“phenomenon-a-nom-a-nom”! Livestock can eat more and gain less. Some of you know that fall annuals help fill the menu with better nutrition. The quick and new growth of brassicas and other cool season annual species that fit the fall season are examples. One last fall application of fertilizer may boost growth of permanent species and some spring planted annuals, but the actual RFV and % protein will never match what they produced in grazing the early season or in hay – the preferred first and second cutting.

ST. CROIX SHEEP GENETICS AND ALC GRANT APPLICATION

There's been lots of research lately (and not so lately) concerning genetic characteristics for sheep. Everything from “Whole Genome Structural Analysis of Caribbean Hair Sheep Reveals Quantitative Link to West African Ancestry” to “Research into Genetic Susceptibility to Ovine Progressive Pneumonia at USDA Meat Animal Research Center.”

SCHSBI has some ideas on using genetic information to benefit the St Croix breed. The Livestock Conservancy offers grants to individuals and groups who are working to preserve and propagate endangered livestock. The SCHSBI has applied for one of these grants. The proposed project is to work with genetic researchers to genetically 'profile' enough St Croix sheep, to develop a detailed picture of what the genetics of St Croix look like. 8 St Croix sheep had “50K SNP” testing done in the 90's. And now there will hopefully many more sheep tested to develop the genetic 'picture'. You may be asked to test some of your sheep – although it means a bit of work for the producer, hopefully everyone asked will participate.

This genetic 'picture' of a St Croix sheep can be used in a variety of ways. It can be used to identify disease resistance and disease vulnerabilities on a breed level. One way might to identify St Croix who have lost the docu-

mentation as St Croix. Being able to show that these sheep are genetically St Croix may increase a sheep's usefulness as breeding stock and hence their value. Researchers on the genetic basis of parasite resistance, twinning, muscling – and other topics we can only guess at – may be using St Croix genetic data.

Look for more information on this project in the future. If you have a particular interest in the topic, please feel free to contact a board member.

Lori



THE SUMMER SLUMP...

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It's all about the decreasing day length and natural plant response.

In sheep, parasite resistance can have a second component. Resistance means “no problems all of the time”. **Parasite resilience** is the other part. Resilience means “no problems most of the time”. (The sheep with little resistance are not the ones we are discussing here; unfortunately we know them ASAP.) During the summer slump you can pick out the sheep, generally, with only resilience to parasites. They begin, for a period of time, to exhibit parasite related symptoms that were not obvious in the past. It might just be bottle jaw and that symptom can come and go. If you check the sheep early in the morning you can see lambs or adults with bottle jaw and by evening some will not show any problem. The symptom might exhibit as a bit less condition in these lambs. If you weigh animals it can be a slowed weight gain. Or if you only observe your sheep moving you already know that the laggards, the last ones through a gate, the ones dragging behind and the ones walking at the rear while the others are running either have low energy or maybe they have other health issues. If they are low energy, slow and lesser: it is a good chance that they have a parasite load.

We have several decisions to make during the “slump”:

1. Do we choose to supplement the sheep in the fall, especially providing protein to lambs? Feed costs will make the answer for you. Good hay may be a better option. Or just selling down numbers.
2. Do we plant fall annuals (cool season species) in the late summer to fill the slump? Local weather and conditions will help you decide on the planting of annuals question. I'll give you an example from here in the SE USA. I could fertilize warm season grasses

and plant fall annuals. With the current rain pattern I'd actually appear successful. The downside is that armyworms have been a big problem for months and they are attracted and flourish on highly fertilized and tender new growth. Along with the costs of seeds, time, equipment and fertilizer I'd have to plan the expense for at least one spraying and maybe multiple sprayings.

3. Do we write down tag numbers of the sheep which are either dragging along, are messy, stop growing or exhibit bottle jaw? The right answer: YES! This question is universally important. We need to note inferior sheep and cull all of them.
4. The ultimate question: do you collect fecal samples and have FEC (fecal egg count) data on your sheep? This is a two line story but the difference in FECs and FAMACHA – **FAMACHA selects for resilience. FECs data lead us to resistance.**

Whatever you do, whatever your location: this seasonal change, the summer slump, is an annual issue for you. Know what to expect, plan ahead and make it the best choice for your livestock and your wallet.

Eddie



PRESIDENT'S RAMBLE...

(Continued from page 2)

in by hand. **SCHSB is still the same, original association, as started by Dr. Foote, but with a name change for legal reasons in more recent years.** Any other registry, and there have been at least three or four others that I know of, have always been splinter groups or spinoffs. If your sheep are registered with SCHSB, you have them in the original association.

This might strike you as odd or wrong, but sheep were still being added to the registry into the 1990's. Some were either imported from St. Croix or purchased from USU. What you might not know is that pure sheep which were in USDA or university research flocks could be purchased and the owner would fill out the registration paper and send it to the registrar even that late in the formation of the breed. The registrar's job started with Dr. Foote and was handled by a numerous members or association secretaries over the years until the association chose to go with a registry service. If you go to the registry records and/or look at extended pedigrees of our sheep on registration papers you will find some sheep that have no parentage. Sheep from the USU flock were registered by the university initials and a unique number like "USU 12345". But even today the current sheep at USU are not registered and if you want to add one to your flock you would need to be sure that it can be registered in SCHSB before you purchase it. I visited a prominent flock in the 1990s and they had sheep named USDA 1, USDA 2 ... one ram was named Ragan (for Ram Ain't Got A Name)! This member had made an all-out effort to save pure St. Croix sheep which were going to be sold as commercial sheep in a USDA-ARS flock disposal sale, but were known to be pure sheep. I will add that these were excellent sheep. Also, in your looking at pedigrees you'll see some of the late imports will also have no parentage and they might have a name like Island Boy or M39.

So **back to the positive ending.** We all like a "...happily ever after" story! Technology can now help us clear up a majority of the errors we have discussed in parentage errors by reasonably priced genetic testing. On top of that, **your SCHSB board of directors has agreed to work with a quantitative geneticist in a research project to collect and analyze DNA samples on a wide cross section of living sheep in the breed in an effort to genetically define the breed.** It is done at a level of sophistication that I cannot comprehend enough to fully explain but is cutting edge, genetic technology.

In the coming months we will research bloodlines, pedigrees and historic flocks in an attempt to select a sampling of sheep which are unique in the line or historic source flocks

"If your sheep are registered with SCHSB, you have them in the original association."

which they represent. The minimum targeted number to build a genetic definition of the breed is 50 sheep. For example - there are "eastern USA" clusters of St. Croix genetics just as there are "western clusters" of our sheep's genetics. There will be a major effort made to not miss any line, imported influence, late registered animals or any animal that has unique, regional or rare bloodlines in its pedigree. If one of the SCHSB directors contacts you and ask you to help get samples taken and shipped on a particular sheep or two, please help us get that done. We'll be reimbursing costs of testing, shipping and handling so that no one is burdened. Your cooperation is invaluable. Thank you.

There are more benefits to the genetic testing than I care to prolong here in this article but

PRESIDENT'S RAMBLE...

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please know that we can be assured that our breed will benefit from this effort for decades to come. From what I have been told, **correct parentage can be identified on both young and old sheep.** I know there are limits on how far back we can go in the pedigrees because older sheep are not available for a tissue sample. We can also quickly learn more about our sheep than just parentage and purity. SCHSB will always strive for the purity and betterment of our beloved breed. This is an application of cutting edge technology to protect the purity of the breed

now and in the future and to support each and every current member.

Eddie



Matt Morgan



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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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.

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