

St. Croix
Hair Sheep
Breeders,
Inc.



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www.stcroixsheep.org

News & Views

PRESIDENT'S RAMBLE *WHAT'S IN YOUR SHEEP FLOCK?*



Sometimes I think I am more interested in experimenting and learning than anything else on the farm. Seeds, plants, trees, sheep, cows; you name it and it gets tried and trialed. So I still sort through records on a slow evening and try to learn patterns of breeding and inheritance with the sheep. The one illusive trait that many of us chase is weight gain for individual sheep either as pounds per day, a certain weight at a desired age, a pattern of growth, extra muscling or some other configuration.

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THE NECESSITY OF CULLING

Without selection, there can be no progress. It sounds simple, but when it comes down to it, selection in meat animals mean that the superior live to breed and the inferior find their forever homes on the plate of a consumer. For some this may seem a harsh reality, but the fact remains that the St. Croix is a meat sheep! We have previously discussed points by which to select good stock, particularly good rams, but what are some basis by which to cull ewes?

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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...

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Talking weight? Also have to talk feed.

Our breed needs adequate growth and adequate mature weights to allow the potential for desirable lamb weights at given ages. Age brackets such as weaning weights at 2 to 3 months old, a 5 month weight just to see how they're growing, a 7 month weight to see if we are getting close to a market lamb or a yearling weight to see if we are keeping the sheep in accord with the knowledge we have of the original imports can be important. But when we talk weight then we also have to talk feed.

What I have found to be useful here in the humid SE USA is to let the lambs eat what nature provides and provide mineral and water. I have supplemented in past years but that can rack up a feed bill and with the ups and downs of forage production, due to environmental effects, the slower gainers or the lesser sheep show up as slower or lesser and the better sheep also display what I am looking for in breeders. But the pastures are improved to make the process work.

So the question needs to be asked: are we seeing progress? The answer is **yes but by degrees**. The ewes and ewe lambs pasture lamb here and with 80+ lambs born this spring there were 3 known deaths of lambs:

1. Electrocuted himself in a fence in a freak accident.
2. Died as a healthy lamb in his sleep.
3. Remains of a buzzard maligned lamb was found.

This is with hands-off management. I am proud of the ewes and ewe lambs and I really cannot ask for better for those traits. Ram lambs hit 100+/- pounds at 13.5 months this year with no supplementation. Two, which were not considered to be breeder quality, were taken in for processing this month. They had live weights of 95lbs and 100lbs and hot carcass weights of 48lbs and 43lbs for a 47% average dress out. I think that is good data to talk about. And although I am not interested in giant mature St. Croix breeders, we have a mature ram from an outstanding ewe that is bumping around in the 170 pound range just on pasture conditions as a 3 year old. That is 20 to 30+ pounds bigger than our average. Fluke or real? We'll know in a year or two.

Ram lambs hit 100+/- pounds at 13.5 months this year with no supplementa-

The one thing that has irritated me the most has been a slight lack of resistance to internal parasites in a few lambs. It might just be one lamb of a set of twins or just one of 40. Now that baffles me! But to cut to the chase we continue to cull the lambs and the parents as commercials and hope to get those genes out of the flock. The most irritating part is that it seems to act as a recessive gene that can disappear for a year or two and then pop up in a lamb. A tad bit of wisdom for no extra charge: often you can tell which sheep are more prone to parasites because they will have slower growth or less gains for a given period of time as compared to their buddies.

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THE NECESSITY OF CULLING...



OR



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One of the primary reasons to cull any ewe is her inability to wean a good lamb.

It should be a point of practice to cull any ewe who does not accept her lambs or needs to be juggled in order for her to establish a bond with her young.

Ours is a maternal breed and the mothering ability of our ewes is of paramount importance. Ewes should, ideally, lamb on pasture and readily mother their young even amongst the rest of the flock. 1.6 lambs per ewe seems to be an average figure, but once you have developed a line of ewes that consistently shows good instincts, preference should be given to ewe lambs born as twins when you are selecting replacements.

Along with a ewe's maternal capacity, it is also wise to check the udders of your flock prior to turning out the rams. The udder of a dry ewe should be loose and pliable. If you feel a mass or "knot" you have discovered evidence of mastitis, a bacterial infection of the udder. Mastitis reduces milk production which results in smaller lambs. It is best practice to remove these ewes from the flock to increase the productivity and therefore the profitability of the flock.

Lameness is another point by which to cull. Hoof growth has a lot to do with nutrition, but if you are noticing a few outliers in the flock who need more consistent podiatric care than her peers, cull her. Our breed is touted as one which is low maintenance.

There is no excuse for promoting poor genetics.

Also, if your flock has been exposed to persistent hoof rot, make it a habit to cull symptomatic individuals. By contracting the infection they have shown an immune system more compromised than the rest of the flock and she should no longer contribute to the gene pool.

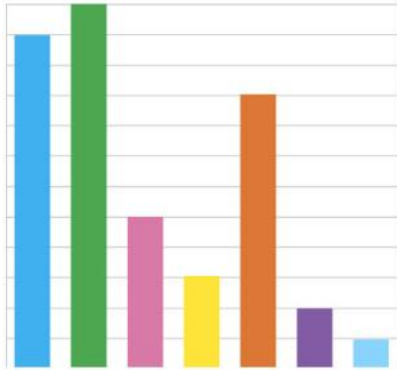
Finally, I will beat the dead horse. If you have wormy sheep, cull them! Of all the many wonderful traits our breed can contribute to the industry, none is so necessary to it as it's

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PRESIDENT'S RAMBLE...

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There's an ad we have all seen and the memorable line is, "What's in your wallet?" What we need to know is "**What's in your sheep flock**"? The information is important to potential buyers and seekers whether they are breeders of registered sheep or commercial breeders looking to get ahead of labor or de-worming duties. They want to know what St. Croix sheep can do that other breeds cannot do or claim to almost do. We have a real resource in the St. Croix sheep. Let's make them the best that they can be. Select, cull, study, improve and support the breed.



I have mentioned a **flock data program** for members several times in the past. We are still negotiating that effort. It will be a dream come true for all of us if we can uniformly discuss our flock data and sort easily. Billy Hearnberger posted on Facebook recently about an outstanding ewe due to her lambing record. Matt Morgan told us that he had a ewe that is attempting to raise quads in the pasture by herself. Wouldn't it be nice if a **flock data program** could help us make more of these

THE NECESSITY OF CULLING...

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parasite resistance. This is the crowning jewel of the St. Croix, and we must continue to select our breeding stock from only the most resistant of individuals. If you have not yet quit deworming your sheep, I urge you to do so. I can assure you that the marketability of your replacement stock will increase.

While selection pushes the needle forward, culling ensures that it doesn't return to the point of beginning. They are two sides of the same coin and one is worthless without the other. We must be vigilant and, I daresay, ruthless when it comes time to turn the rams out. Only let the best of your ewes get bred and send the rest down the road. Your lamb crop will be better for it and you will have more winter forage for the money makers. When your ewes begin to meet all of your expectations, tighten the screws and cull for something more. And never second guess your gut feeling to cull a ewe. Sure, you may cull one or two good ones, but you'll be sure you got rid of all the lemons.

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SOME OF MY EWES DO NOT GET BRED



Is this a genetic defect, a problem with the ram or to be expected? In small flocks or with the flock management where the ram stays with the ewes all year you might not see this situation. There are numerous articles which tell us that the percent of ewe lambs we should expect to be bred is about 85 to 90%. The article link below gives us similar data and is explaining why. It also gives us some how-to's on ewe lamb development. <http://livestocktrail.illinois.edu/sheepnet/paperDisplay.cfm?ContentID=454>

This article is probably developed for wool sheep but the only thing I can see that is dif-

ferent is that St. Croix ewe lambs tend to breed at earlier ages if they have grown well prior to being exposed to a ram.

“...genetic defect, a problem with the ram...?”

What remains is the two-headed question; Try to rebreed them or sell them as market animals? **That is a personal decision.** If you keep back extra replacements the answer is easier. You expected to cull some anyway. If you kept an exact amount of replacements then you have to wonder if the ones that did not breed are slower to develop reproductive functions, are they sterile, are they smaller (still growing) so that they did not have adequate body condition to allow energy to go to reproduction or if they will be fine with a second exposure to a ram?

The decisions of keeping unbred ewe lambs after a first exposure to rams is a personal decision but the cleanest decision is to sell them as market lambs and know that the replacements that you kept are viable breeders.

Eddie

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type sheep at a faster rate? In the meanwhile Yates Colby has joined with NSIP to begin collecting and reporting her flock data to build EBVs for her flock and individual sheep. I need to join her in that effort. She is to be commended in her progress. We never know if the next step will be the one to get us where we want to go but we need to keep trying, experimenting and to borrow a phrase from my 4H days: “to make the best better”.

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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Half Page	7" x 4.5" or 3.25" x 9.5"	\$55	\$140
Full Page	7" x 9.5"	\$90	\$240

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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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