
The Nebraska Advantage . . . Sheep

When it comes to quality seedstock, the State of Nebraska is a leader. Nebraska sheep breeders have a long and progressive tradition of dedication to excellence and pride of accomplishment. The result has been predictability of performance that provides the cornerstone of a highly productive commercial lamb and wool industry.



New state-of-the-art technologies have provided additional opportunities to create sheep of superior quality. Modern scientific methods have increased the capability and accuracy of performance evaluation and expanded producer accessibility of genetic materials. The end result is highly productive, healthy seedstock that can vastly improve the efficiency of meat and fiber production.

Genetics

Creating quality seedstock takes time, patience, and knowledge. This is why many U.S. purebred producers regularly utilize performance records to evaluate, select, and breed the best to create genetically superior animals. To aid producers in keeping records and improving their flocks, various computer-assisted evaluation programs exist in the U.S.

The National Sheep Improvement Program (NSIP) is one of the most advanced programs for genetic improvement in the world. NSIP utilizes electronic technology to help producers genetically improve their flocks for reproduction, growth, and wool production. NSIP uses state-of-the-art technology to calculate Flock Expected Progeny Differences (FEPD), which are based on the animal's own performance and that of its relatives. Producers use FEPD information for their selection, mating, and culling decisions. The increased use of AI practices is expanding the availability of outstanding sires at any time and location in the world and improving the market potential for superior germ plasma.

Health

Health programs, such as the Breeding Soundness Examination, help producers improve flock production by achieving optimum breeding performance. By controlling disease and other external stresses such as temperature and through semen evaluation and visual inspection, most producers can effectively determine the breeding ability of their rams and ensure an improved lamb crop.

Fiber



Producing the highest quality wool clip can be achieved by applying Wool Quality Evaluation standards. Using this evaluation method, producers objectively determine fiber diameter, variability, strength, and staple length. Seedstock producers can then use this information for selection to rapidly improve the genetic merit of their flock for wool production.

Technology



In addition to existing programs, animal researchers continue to develop new science-based technologies to increase the rate of genetic change. Intrauterine laparoscopic techniques, which have enhanced the use of embryo transfer and improved the rate of fertility for artificial insemination, are now being used by many producers.

Nebraska producers take advantage of current research to guide their programs. The USDA's Meat Animal Research Center (MARC) at Clay Center, Nebraska, is the largest of its kind in the nation. The MARC's research program places the highest priority on the development of intensive and semi-intensive sheep production system technology capable of

having an immediate impact on the sheep industry. Although the program is largely oriented towards fundamental research, emphasis is placed on the generation of technology that can be practically implemented by small farmers and commercial sheep producers alike within a relatively short time frame. Specific research efforts are not oriented toward wool production problems because research efforts relating to wool are being conducted at state agricultural experiment stations and other USDA research centers.

The sheep research program is organized on a multi-disciplinary basis with the focus on solutions to specific problems that represent the greatest technological constraints to improving production efficiency and product desirability. The program is also designed to complement existing domestic and international research programs in the development of sheep production technology.

Discover the Nebraska Advantage

Most seedstock producers market breeding animals via private treaty farm or ranch sales. However, sheep shows and sales are big business in the U.S. and, since the early 1800s, producers have depended on these events for exhibiting breed quality characteristics, establishing new breed standards, and merchandising seedstock.

Most major sheep shows and sales are regional or national, and feature as many as 10 different breeds. Shows provide a highly competitive setting where breeders can compete and compare their animals. Following the live judging based on breed standard criteria, animals are sold at public auction.

We invite you to discover the "Nebraska Advantage" of superior breeding stock. We are confident you can find the livestock assistance you need in Nebraska. If you would like more information about Nebraska sheep, or how you might visit our state, please contact the Ag Promotion and Development Division, Nebraska Department of Agriculture.

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