VERMONT SHEEP & GOAT

FROM THE EDITOR

Saying goodbye can be the hardest part

By Mary Lake, Bethel, VT

After reading through this issue several times, there is a bit of advice I keep coming back to from Dr. Joe Emenheiser's article in his new column, Breeding Matters on Page 10. He wrote: "Beware the difference between breeders and marketers. The breeder seeks to change their animals to better serve the needs of human society. The marketer seeks to change human culture to be more receptive to what they have to sell. If you want animals that work for you and not the other way around, seek animals that are bred to work."

Being a shearer, I get to see a lot of farms and a lot of sheep and goats, all sorts of breeds and breed combinations. There is a common conversation I have with farmers I shear for who have multiple breeds in their flocks. After their animals are sheared, with the fiber all off and the body exposed, it is easy to see who is doing well and who is struggling.

Often, the farmer will say, "I feed them all the same thing. I don't know why they don't all look the same."

We could stand there all day and talk about why they look different: some are old, some have big lambs nursing on them, some are recovering from being sick. Often I've seen in a flock or herd of mixed breeds, the animals of the same breed will look similar: similarly skinny, just right or fat. And I say, "I think it's just a breed thing."

Tongue-in-cheek, I'll point to the best-looking animal, "you should breed more of that kind."

But seriously, they should breed more of what works, right? It's easier said than done. It means making tough decisions and saying goodbye to animals that aren't working for you. What I have seen from the farmer who determines what works and weeds out what doesn't is more consistency amongst the animals and a happier farmer. I think they are happier because they made smart decisions that resulted in a more productive operation and less maintenance work for themselves.

A lot of farmers ask me what to do with the animals that aren't working for them. Some suggestions I make are:

- REHOME: Become a member of the VSGA and post on the listserv or on the Web site the animals you need to rehome. An animal that doesn't work for you, might work for someone else because they have a different management style or different goals. Use the animal's positive traits to sell it to a more appropriate fit.
- PROCESS: If the animal you want to cull is under a year old, you may be able to process it into retail lamb cuts. If the animal is older, or the carcass isn't worth the cost of processing for meat, the hide, skull or horns may still be valuable. Tanned hides or bleached skulls can be meaningful ways to honor an animal or bring in a small profit. If you will be consuming the meat yourself or taking the carcass to a composting facility, on-farm slaughter may be more appropriate and affordable.

I haven't been in this business long, but from what I've seen so far, whether you run a large or small operation, it is important that it be efficient and enjoyable. Your quality of life and that of your animals is key to having a successful farm. I hope this issue of the newsletter is helpful for you and your sheep or goat operation.

The Vermont Sheep & Goat Association Newsletter is edited by Mary Lake (mary.m.lake@gmail.com) and Kristin Plante (sugartopfarm@yahoo.com). It is a venue for sharing stories, images and reports related to sheep and goats. If you enjoy writing, reporting or photography and have content of your own or are looking for an assignment, contact Mary or Kristin.

MID 2016 IN THIS ISSUE

GRAZING

Smart pasture planning can yield better crisis management

Kimberly Hagen
University of Vermont Extension Grazing Specialist

It's spring and time for the annual reminder about good grazing practices. It won't be long now before we turn our four-legged livestock out onto pastures for the season. From the perspective of winter's chore of providing the daily feed in the form of thrown hay bales, the thought of our small ruminants harvesting their own feed is enough to bring on the smiles. And now before any fence posts are set in the ground – is the time to make a plan for a grazing system. Think about how your farm works, and how you move the animals around. Where does it make sense to put permanent fence and where does it make sense to have temporary fence or flexinet? You want to make it as simple as you can on your landscape. If you keep the daily chores as low input as possible, you'll have the energy to deal with crises when they come along – as they always do.

Good grazing management will go a long way to keep both land and livestock healthy. There are formulas for calculating how many livestock a piece of land can support - but all too often I find there are so many variables with each farm it's better to look at these formulas as providing a starting place or guide. Roughly an acre can support 4 to 6 grazing sheep and a few more goats, for the season. But here are some basic rules for good grazing management no matter where your farm is located. Once you have observed and learned the capacity and production level of your farm, you can make your adjustments accordingly.

- **Divide and subdivide** your pastures into paddocks – as many as you can for your time and labor limits.
- **3 Day Rule** – Try to not leave livestock on a paddock beyond 3 days. Forage and plants will try to initiate re-growth after 3 days of being clipped or grazed. A second grazing on the plant will require it to draw on reserves to regrow, thus moving your pasture from the **resource available** column into the **expense** column of your farm. It will also encourage the reproduction of weeds, or worse, invasive species.
- **4 inch rule** – Avoid grazing lower than 4 inches or even better - not lower than 6 inches – not only is this parasite territory (*Haemonchus contortus* especially), but plants will regrow much faster with greater leaf area to utilize photosynthesis, or solar energy, which is free.
- **Residue is OK** – Especially if pastures are being reclaimed or renovated – think in terms of grazing 20% and leaving 80% trampled material to add organic matter.
- **REST, REST, REST** – allow paddocks time to fully recover from grazing. In early grazing months you'll need somewhere between 12 to 18 days rest. By mid to late August you need to allow 35 to 40 days rest between grazing periods.
- **Sacrifice Paddock** - For exceptionally wet or dry periods, put animals on sacrifice paddock with hay and allow pasture time to recover. This will often bring a gain in grazing time elsewhere. Remember, if the forage has been rested and allowed to grow, it can be grazed even through snow. The nutritional value is still there.

Grazing provides us with a vision of lovely pastoral harmony, universally adored. But like all lovely things, there's yin to the yang, an opposite to the beauty. Lurking in that chomping of the green feed is the ever-present population of parasites, ready to take whatever opportunity presents itself for finding a hosting place for reproduction, feeding and continuation of its species. Good grazing management is your frontline proactive control of parasite impact on your flock or herd.

As we all know, small ruminants and especially their young, are particularly susceptible to internal parasites. For the shepherd that cares for them, it is a constant worry and time-consuming health issue. Yet, ironically, it is the shepherd (and veterinarian) that has probably exacerbated the problem most with the intensive use of powerful anthelmintics developed in the 1960's. The parasites particular to these animals have co-existed since their beginning. Without human intervention, they tend to develop a mostly balanced existence since those without resistance to the parasites die, ending that genetic thread. (Such as the sheep of St. Kilda islands off the coast of Scotland – a separate story).
The anthelmintics (chemical wormers) provided a reprieve, making this problem go away quickly, and it

Continued on Page 11

FIBER

How to sell your wool

A series of articles exploring the ways to make money from your fleeces by **Jessica Dillner**, fiber artist and sheep and goat breeder, of Dillner Hillside Farm in Montgomery Center.

#4: Washed and Dyed Locks

I can't help but admire the perfect curls of a pretty longwool fleece at any Sheep & Wool Festival I go to. There is a certain beauty in a freshly sheared, well-presented crimpy raw wool fleece. The curls themselves add dimension and structure to the fiber. There are quite a number of artisans and crafters that work with washed uncarded wool and mohair to preserve those pristine locks. As a fiber producer, washed and sometimes dyed fleece can be another product to offer for sale to add income to the farm.

Many longwool sheep breeds grow wool that has a characteristic large open crimp or tight curls. Some breed examples include Lincoln, Teeswater, Blue-faced and Border Leicester, Gotland, Cotswold, Wensleydale and Leicester longwool. Angora goats produce fleeces of mohair that also have nice lock structure and extreme luster. Some primitive breeds of sheep like Icelandic and Karakul don't have curly wool but straight hair-like fleece, which is also interesting and useful to fiber artists. Long, silky suri alpaca fleece can also be fitting for some types of art projects. Even some finer wool breed sheep like Dorset, Finn and Montadale can have some curly edges.

The fiber artist may use washed and dyed fleece in MANY creative ways! As a handspinner, I separate and spin individual locks of both wool and mohair to make unique novelty handspun yarns. A colleague of mine who is a doll-maker, carefully attaches the base of wool or mohair locks to a dolls head to make very realistic "hair". Beautiful sheets of wet-felted fabric or wet-felted scarves can be accented with thin layers of fiber curls to add texture and dimension to a 2–D piece. Wool and mohair locks are a favorite among needle-felters. Tight small white curls for bearded "Santa" figures and wide open curls to represent the waves of an ocean. I have even seen part of a long wool fleece wet-felted without much alteration to create a "sheepskin" without the hide part!

The fiber producer can tap into this artist wool market by paying attention to the animal's fleece during the growing period. The wool selected should come from healthy animals without a wool "break." The wool should be of proper usable length, typically 4 -10 inches long; 6 inches being a nice average. A good shearing job is always very important! The wool should be relatively clean of hay and debris (artists may have the patience to pick out a little hay but really won't want to pay a premium for messy wool no matter how nice the curls). It is perfectly reasonable to just use the best portions of a fleece to sell as washed and dyed. Usually, the chest and sides of a sheep, omitting the weathered topline, coarse britch area or short belly wool. (Those wool parts can be further processed into a roving/batts, etc.). The selected wool can be handwashed carefully to preserve the fleece structure.

Here is the method I use to wash fleece: (There are many other good ways to wash wool, too!)

Using two 5 gal. buckets and 1-2 lbs. of wool, alpaca or mohair, fill the first bucket with 120 F water for wool or alpaca and 160 F water for mohair.

Add about 1/4 to 1/3 cup of Dawn dish soap (or some Power Scour for mohair).

Add the fiber to the hot soapy water and move up and down gently. Use rubber gloves to protect your hands. You can allow to soak about 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, prepare the other bucket with same temperature water used previously.

Take the fiber out of the first bucket and allow to drain some. If it seems like all the soap is gone, you may have to add more soap to the next bucket.

Add the hot drained fiber to the second bucket for either a second wash or first rinse depending on how dirty it is. Move fiber up and down gently to allow the water to flow through the fleece but do not agitate it.

Dump the hot dirty water somewhere other than your house septic system. The lanolin and grease can be bad for individual home systems. I dump the hot water in our driveway so as not to kill the grass with such hot water.

Prepare a third bucket with hot fresh water and add the drained fiber. This may be all the washing you need to do but many times it may be necessary to do it a fourth or fifth rinse if it is really greasy wool or mohair. Once the water is relatively clean, the fiber can be drained and then dried on racks or continue on to the dyeing process.

Continued on Page 9

GETTING STARTED

Dog breeder explains benefits of instinctive guardian

Sheep and goat owner relies on Maremmas for security and finds their companionship and devotion heartwarming

Story and Photos By **Wendy Mae**
NEK Sheep & Goat Farm, Craftsbury, VT

Livestock Guardian Dogs have been used for centuries in Europe and Asia to assist farmers and shepherds in guarding their livestock and farmland. With all the mountains and hills that the livestock climb and graze, the dogs help shepherds protect and guard them from the predators that live and dwell in the same woods and mountains.

The need for protection isn't much different here in the United States and specifically here in Vermont. As LGD breeders, we are getting more and more calls from people experiencing predator problems who hadn't had any in the past. Predators are becoming more prevalent as more land is being developed, pushing the wild animals out of their territories. They are then forced to coexist more closely with us as humans and find other resources for food.

In light of this, there is the ever growing need to protect our investments and much loved livestock, be it sheep, goats, birds, or cattle. Here at Northeast Kingdom (NEK) Sheep & Goat Farm, we found the Maremma breed of LGD to be an invaluable asset on our homestead.

There are more then 40 LGD breeds out there, which can make the decision making process a bit overwhelming. However, the choice was simple for us because we trusted in the word and experience of other large sheep and goat breeders we knew. With their recommendation, we chose to go with the beautiful, white Maremma.

There are four other breeds that look almost identical to the Maremma, yet each one is slightly different from the other and vary in strengths. LGD breeds all share the similar function and instinct of guarding and protecting through the bonding that happens with the livestock and caretakers they grow up with.

LGDs are different from other breeds because of this strong livestock bonding and guardian instinct. They are also independent thinkers and very perceptive of their environment. They like to take a role of leadership, working with the shepherd, not for him. From their gained experience, socializing, and general upbringing, they learn to make their own decisions on how to best protect the livestock. The shepherd trusts them to make these choices, and the dogs ward off predators as they see fit.

The most common LGD breeds in the U.S. are the Great Pyrenees, Anatolian Shepherds, Akbash and Maremma. If you look keenly amongst the fields and hills of Vermont's farms and homesteads, you may find sheep or goats grazing under the watchful eye of a LGD. You may see them lounging in the sun or shade of a tree, happy to be with their sheep or goat family, but always with their senses on alert.

An LGD, otherwise called a sheepdog, is not the kind of herding dog you may think of when the word "sheepdog" is

Northeast Kingdom Sheep & Goat Farm's livestock guardian dog, Star, with their Dorset sheep in Craftsbury, VT.

mentioned. These dogs are protectors and guardians first and foremost, not herding dogs like the Shetland or Corgi. It isn't that they won't bring back a ewe that has wandered from the flock, but that their motivation to do so is completely different. Both kinds of dogs have instinctive behaviors that drive them; the LGD always approaches situations from a protective standpoint.

Storm, a Dorset ewe, lets Lexi, a 9-month-old LGD pup, give her a kiss.

LGDs are not the kind of dog you want to send out at the end of the day to round up the sheep. They would rather lead the flock home and defend against anything that threatens them along the way. They make themselves one of the sheep, a family member amongst the flock. While living and bonding with the flock, the LGD gets to know each sheep or goat by sight and smell. That is also one of the ways they can tell when something different is in their midst, even if it's a sheep who wanders over from another flock nearby.

IS A LGD GOOD FOR MY FARM OR HOMESTEAD?

If you are thinking about acquiring a LGD, there are some questions to consider. Is your homestead going to be around as long as your dog is, who may live up to 15 years of age? Do you have the space for a LGD to stretch his legs and run around? Do you have enough livestock to keep a LGD from getting bored?

It is also good to know that barking is part of what they do to warn and deter unwanted guests from checking out your property. It is something to consider, especially if you have close neighbors. Our Maremmas talk back and forth with the coyotes that run our borders. The dogs seem to tell the coyotes this land is staked out and they better not cross onto it. Even to a loud clap of thunder, they will bark back at the sky, "You'd better be careful about coming in my direction." They will confront something until they come to understand it, and it becomes familiar. Routines are key with a LGD, because they will react to things that are out of the normal.

Our Maremmas also know every car that comes down our driveway and if there is one that's different from the ten other cars they have grown to recognize, they let us know it. They can even tell when we acquire a new barn coat for ourselves. They may take a step back from us when we first enter their space with new clothing on until they smell that we are the same person they know and love.

Their "family," or whatever livestock they have bonded with as they mature, is their first priority. They won't just let anyone into their space. They are extremely affectionate with their owners and even children who are a part of their regular lives, but they are wary of strangers. If exposed to children at a young age a Maremma will eagerly accept them just like any other part of their protective family. Also, the more exposure they have as pups to different people the easier it is to bring strangers into their space when they are more mature. It all depends on how much you want them socialized.

As LGDs, Maremmas were bred to live outside year round with the flocks and herds they grow up with. They will bond with them and stay alert to dangers and predators who might try to invade their territory. In order to do their job, they must think and act independently, because the shepherd can't be there all of the time to tell them what to do. They were bred to be thinking dogs, not responsive dogs.

Unlike most canine pets they won't necessarily respond to the general commands like come, sit, and lie down, although they are capable of that. They learn to make their own decisions by instinct and experience. Ultimately they will be the ones deciding how to care for their livestock. We just help guide them along the way.

A LGD may or may not choose to do what you say. They are not stubborn or unwilling, and they do want to

please their caretaker. We may have their full attention one moment, but in the next they take off like a bullet to check on a new noise. We become their second concern, as their first priority is to investigate potential threats. So, whatever we were engaged in at the time, even if it was much adored belly rubs, it becomes a thing of the past. After all, they are also there to protect us!

WHAT IS TRAINING LIKE?

One of the biggest concerns we hear from people who are considering a LGD is their nervousness on what is involved with training them. We get asked, how much time do I have to spend training the new puppy? What do I do to introduce the new puppy to the livestock? Or, how will I know I'm teaching the puppy properly so I don't ruin him or her? These are all questions we hear often and they are easily answered.

Even at a young age, Maremma pups will develop most of their guardian behaviors instinctively. But they also learn from watching their parents, as well as through relating to their litter mates in the few short months they are together. Little hands on work is necessary in teaching them how to guard the livestock because it's just who they are. It's amazing to watch those traits come out naturally: like when they find the high point on the property where they can keep an eye on the most land possible, and when a four-week-old pup who can hardly walk on his sausage-sized legs comes up to a ewe who has lowered her face to give her a puppy-sized kiss. They are truly bred to bond and protect.

They do need some work on general socializing, manners, teaching them fencing boundaries, and to respect the livestock. Gentle but firm and consistent correction is enough to teach them what you expect. As they grow and mature they learn through observation, and then through deduction of what is normal for the area the live in. If it's not normal activity they respond accordingly. They don't work well with someone trying to control them. Remember, they are more the shepherd's partner but they very much want to be pleasing too. They are intelligent, thinking dogs.

PREDATOR PROTECTION: VISIT FROM A BEAR

We've been using Maremmas for almost 10 years now and have been very pleased with our choice of LGD breed. We enjoy trustworthy dogs who help us in caring for the livestock as well as caring for our personal security. During that time we have not lost one of our livestock to predators and no one has showed up to our homestead without the dogs alerting us well in advance. We do have other security in place, however, we trust our dogs and they have never let us down. We can rest easy at night knowing that our loyal protectors, who are not afraid to confront anything that might venture close to them, safely guard the lambs and kids.

One day a young but mature bear strolled out of the woods on our property into the cleared area just outside all of our livestock fencing, specifically right near our goat herd and the meat birds we were raising that year. I, too, was outside in the yard putting away some garden tools with a couple of our Maremmas and our house Labrador.

It was a peaceful mid-morning and I didn't hear anything other than the wind and the birds singing, when all of a sudden there was a loud snap of a branch coming from the woods 150 feet ahead of me. In a flash, two of our Maremma guardians took off to the far corner of their paddock which ventures out about 100 feet into the wooded area where the noise came from. They obviously had heard it, but I wasn't real

The bear that came to visit the author's farm in Craftsbury.

concerned, we hear noises like that often. My first thought was, "I doubt anything would stick around long enough to be a threat after hearing all that barking."

It wasn't unusual for our LGDs to bark at things like that occasionally since they were still pretty young (less then three years) so I didn't think too much of it. Because I didn't react, the dogs that were with me didn't react either, but kept hanging around a little ways from me. I decided to take a look anyway to see what the other Maremmas were confronting — just in case. Yet, while I was walking over there my mind was thinking that I would probably find two very proud LGDs who treed a porcupine with vigor and passion and I would just encourage them and walk away. But that was not the case at all.

Without a sound, this young Vermont black bear approached the back side of our goat paddock and much to his surprise was met face to face with our LGDs. By the time I got there to observe all of this the bear was already up a small beechnut tree with my Maremmas barking continuously at him.

My heart started beating immediately in double time and I turned right around and headed back towards the house. The three dogs that were with me hadn't caught wind of what was going on yet, so I quickly took them with me to a safe place. I didn't want our dogs chasing a bear into the woods; I wanted them with me. I wasn't concerned at all about our goats and left them in the hands of our other two Maremmas who were strongly discouraging the bear from hanging around.

Eventually, he did climb down out of the tree and wandered back into the woods, never to return again. However, I was able to take his picture as he was on his way out.

I was very grateful knowing that the Maremmas had my back that day, as well all our beloved livestock. They are great guardians!

IT'S WORTH THE INVESTMENT

The other thing to look into when searching for a good LGD breeder or even a rescue dog, is where did the LGD come from? It's good to make sure the dogs are from true livestock guardian bloodlines and not just a pet breeder. The imprinting on a LGD pup their first few months with mom, dad, litter mates, and livestock is very important in laying a good foundation for a LGD's life.

We cannot express how much we love our Maremma LGDs and have been more than happy with the investment we made. They are valuable assets on our homestead, as well as being our friends and companions. Their devotion to us is amazing and heart warming.

At Northeast Kingdom (NEK) Sheep & Goat Farm we regularly work with first time LGD owners to help resolve any uneasiness in acquiring a LGD pup and to make their investment of a LDG as smooth and enjoyable as possible.

Contact Wendy Mae: wendy.mae@me.com
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Join the board

If you are interested in joining the board, contact VSGA President Bay Hammond. Being on the board is a great way to support and lead our growing sheep and goat community.

FARM PROFILE

Goat farmer uses animals for education and so much more

The VSGA Newsletter staff (AKA Mary Lake) would like to introduce our new content editor, **Kristin Plante** of Sugartop Farm in Hyde Park, VT. She will be helping Mary by compiling and sourcing stories for each issue. Welcome, Kristin! For our readers, here is a little about her and her family, and to learn more visit www.sugartopfarm.com

Kristin Plante and Mark Boudreau come from a long line of farming ancestors, Kristin's are some ten generations strong. Mark and Kristin live on land that Mark's grandfather purchased when he first moved to Vermont from Canada in 1947. The original farm consisted of over 180 acres. He subdivided the land several times during tough financial times, and eventually decided to sell the remaining 23 acres including the farmhouse and barn to Mark's father and mother. Mark's folks raised replacement dairy heifers until 1989 when they decided to take a hiatus from farming. In 2004, with baby Mallory on the way, Mark and Kristin thought it was time to bring life back to the farm. It began with just a few pigs to grow through the summer but blossomed into a large multispecies family farm again in no time. Their goal was to provide their family and their friends and neighbors with humanely raised, naturally fed meat and eggs while also educating the community about buying locally.

Life Happens After just a short amount of time, Mark and Kristin purchased a small two-acre parcel from the original farmland and began their own homestead. Kristin was a certified veterinary technician and Mark was a lumber salesman, so they had time to continue to grow this hobby farm. Eventually, life morphed. Mallory became very ill and Kristin changed professions to allow her to care for Mallory more easily. Mark purchased a property maintenance business in 2007, which resulted in much longer hours and harder labor. In 2009, when Mallory was well and old enough for proper education, they chose homeschooling. Farming was able to be part of the picture again. This time the journey began slowly with laying hens, and then only animals who could be raised on pasture through the summer and butchered in the fall (pork, chicken, lamb). In 2013, Kristin and Mallory decided to get a couple of Alpine goats as a homeschool project. What happened next no one could anticipate.

Sugar Top Farm, LLC, is Born Mallory was excited for the opportunity to learn what the goats had to teach. She learned husbandry practices, biology & midwifery (goat breeding & kid birthing), anatomy (butchering), parasitology (fecal analysis), chemistry (soap making), culinary skills (cheese, ice cream, and yogurt making), and so much more. What happened next was no more than a science experiment turned unexpected opportunity. Mallory and Kristin tried making goat milk fudge. It was delicious! They felt this was a product that would change the minds of many people who have a stigma associated with goat milk. So, they decided to experiment with flavors and packaging and marketing. The fudge was a hit and began winning awards right away. They created Sugar Top Farm, LLC – a name perfectly fitting for their hilltop location, their sweet confection, and their first goat whose name is Sugar.

The Farm Today Kristin and Mallory continue to homeschool and run Sugar Top Farm, LLC. Their main business is goat related. Kristin makes goat milk fudge and sells it at local farmers' markets. They also sell humanely raised cabrito (goat kid meat), dam and pasture fed. While the farm is not certified organic they follow strict organic practices, which include 100% organic feed for their animals with never any GMOs, hormones, steroids or antibiotics. They follow holistic husbandry practices including: herbal and homeopathic remedies for nourishment and medical care, intensive pasture rotation to eliminate the need to deworm chemically and to revitalize the land, dam rearing of the young, and maintaining a disease (CAE, CL, Johne's) tested negative herd. The modest goat herd consists of Alpines from outstanding and diverse genetics. They breed for disease resistance, cooperative demeanor, milk production and conformation.

Mallory has a special interest in ducks; for eggs, meat, and Muscovies for fly control. She also has begun a quail business.

They grow a large organic garden each year, and sell garlic and excess veggies wholesale and retail. They continue to raise and sell pastured poultry (chicken and turkey) and pork as well.

Sugar Top Farm, LLC is a proud member of the American Dairy Goat Association and the Vermont Sheep and Goat Association.

Beyond The Farm In addition to being the new Content Editor for the VSGA Newsletter, Kristin also serves on the Board of Directors for the Hardwick Farmers' Market.

UPCOMING

Wool Pool to collect again

June 24, 2016, at VTC in Randolph, 10 am – 3 pm

By **Katie Sullivan**
Sheep and Pickle Farm, Williston, VT

The first time I volunteered at the VSGA Wool Pool, I was amazed to see carload after carload of wool arrive. Where was all of this wool coming from? Garages and barn bays emptied out before us as we numbered bags and loaded them in a waiting semi trailer. As the day went on, the trailer load grew until the wool could barely be thrown to the top or compressed into the bottom. We were all a little greasy and a little smelly by the end, but the gathering of shepherds from across the state, swapping stories and advice made the labor fly by.

Vermont has plenty of hair sheep, who produce no wool and require no shearing. Such sheep allow the shepherd to focus on meat or milk production. Vermont also has a share of dedicated fiber-growers, who put tremendous effort into keeping their wool clean so that it can be sold raw to handspinners, or spun into yarn.

But what about farmers with wool sheep who are focused on meat or milk and don't want to or can't afford to add wool products to their farm output? For these farmers, the Vermont Wool Pool can be a great way to market raw wool without cash and time expenditures of making yarn or other products. This year, the Wool Pool will be on June 24th at VTC in Randolph, VT.

Dave Martin of Settlement Farm in Jericho is one such shepherd. He raises mixed-breed sheep with medium wool. His wool is clean, but not pristine. He has too many sheep to hand-sell fleeces to handspinners, and selling yarn would distract from his lamb-selling efforts. He appreciates having the Wool Pool as an outlet for the bulk of his wool clip.

Mary Lake, shearer and Wool Pool organizer, said the last three Wool Pools have supplied Mid-States Wool Growers because they have offered the best overall deal: They pay for wool and do not charge the producer or VSGA for collection or hauling. And, some wool that might otherwise be thrown out is plugged into the American wool industry and used for a variety of things. Individual shepherds may receive more or less favorable prices, so she is always on the look out for other buyers who can best support Wool Pool participants.

At the Wool Pool, bags are label with lot numbers that correspond with a producers invoice. A Mid-States Wool Growers representative said, once in Ohio at Mid-States warehouses, each bag of wool is graded according to cleanliness, presence of hair or kemp, and fiber diameter. The more uniform each bag is, the more valuable the wool is to Mid-States. More valuable wool receives a better price. The representative noted that most Vermont wool has been used within the United States in recent years and scoured in Jamestown, South Carolina, instead of going to China for processing. Even bellies and tags are valuable at the wool pool as any grade of wool can be used for oil spill cleanup.

Some Wool Pool participants are unsure of the value of their wool and some of that wool could easily fetch higher prices than Mid-States offers. Last year, Michael Hampton, owner of Hampton Fiber Mill and Spinnery, set-up a collection at the Wool Pool for fleeces of higher value to be sold at a fleece sale for handspinners and yarnmakers for a premium over its value to Mid-States.

When I dropped off my own wool for spinning at Hampton's, I got a look at some fleeces from David Martin's flock that Hampton had purchased for spinning. While they weren't fine wool by industry standards, Hampton couldn't wait to get them spun into yarn.

For more information on the Wool Pool visit vtsheepandgoat.org or contact Mary Lake, (802) 338-2250, mary.m.lake@gmail.com.

How to sell your wool: #4 Washed and Dyed Locks By Jessica Dillner

From Page 3

The washed and dyed locks can be packaged and sold as is at this point. Depending on the breed, cleanliness, length, color and "beauty," one ounce of locks can be sold for $4 to $8. Locks can be sold in little bags with the animal's name on it or big bags with multiple colors or out of baskets for customers to choose their own. (*Usually locks are sold by weight so it is essential to have a decent scale*.) Bags or fiber kits can contain both roving and locks in different colors. It may seem like a lot of work to package locks but realistically there is less money invested (since you are not sending fiber to a mill) and there is a nice return for your effort if the product is presented in a marketable way. Where to sell this product? Sheep and Wool festivals, farmers' markets, yarn or fiber stores, online with Ebay, Etsy or Ravelry, to school art departments, art supply stores, to individuals who know you have nice wool, etc.! Recently, I was in Sweden and I bought a small bag of dyed Gotland wool for 35 Kr ($4.50) at an artisans' shop - a place you might not expect to find bags of wool. So, be creative in finding a market!

HEALTH

Breeding Matters

A column devoted to the genetic improvement of Vermont livestock by **Dr. Joe Emenheiser**, UVM Extension Livestock Specialist and advisor to the VSGA board. He also manages a nationally-renowned flock of Suffolk sheep in Granville, VT. He can be contacted at joe.emenheiser@uvm.edu

What breed do I need?

Since I started my position with UVM Extension a little over 2 years ago, I have been asked just about every livestock question imaginable. One aspect of my job that I certainly love is that no two days are the same. However, I am often called to resolve situations that could have been avoided if the producer had simply chosen to work with more appropriate livestock. Relatively early, I developed a PowerPoint slide stressing how important it was that animals, resources, products, and markets are all aligned. Since then, I've realized that nearly every problem I've been called about arose from one or more of those four things being out of sync in the system. Sometimes it is a real train wreck.

Breeds for a purpose Let's start in the beginning. All domestication of animals by humans was done to help achieve some sort of goal. Often, that goal was in the form of a product; e.g., meat, milk, fiber, or a combination of the three. Sometimes the goal was a less tangible purpose, like companionship, transportation, or sport. The products and purposes that certain animals were used for have evolved as human needs have changed, but the important part of the relationship was that there was a reason why animals were domesticated in the first place. Over time, selection breeding led to animals that were more and more suited for that purpose, and as those specialized animals started to take on certain physical characteristics, they collectively became known as "breeds."

But there's more to the story, and that is "breeds" are just as commonly defined by the specific area where they originated. The reason for this is that specific regions have specific resource availabilities, and the founding animal breeders sought to breed livestock that could produce the desired products *making best use of the resources that were locally available*. One prime example is the sheep breeds in England, where many breeds are named for their native county and were selectively bred for the local economy.

Natural selection enters into play as well. Breeds that evolved closer to the equator are typically more parasite resistant, because they are subjected to parasites throughout the year, and the ones that couldn't handle it didn't survive. Breeds that evolved farther from the equator tend to be more seasonal breeders, because winter lambs or kids don't fare well in unprotected environments. Breeds that were developed where high quality feedstuffs and/or labor are readily available (e.g., the lowland counties of England) tend to be less hardy, but are larger and more productive when given an adequate plane of nutrition and management.

Thoughts on breed preservation Just as it's important to think about the purpose for which a breed was originally bred, it's also important to realize that a "breed" is not static. Breeds are constantly evolving in response to whatever selection pressures are placed on them. To paraphrase a quote by the pioneering animal breeder Dr. Jay Lush, "A breed is whatever the breeders want it to be." Throughout history, there have been plenty of examples of a "breed" becoming something completely different as a result of changing criteria or outside genetic influences.

Efforts to preserve the genetics of heritage breeds often overlook the fact that all animals are a product of both their genetics and their environment. It is not realistic to bring a breed that evolved in a desert environment to rainy Vermont and expect it to stay "the same" forever. It doesn't take long under a higher plane of nutrition or management for natural selection to start to favor different genes. Within a few generations, "primitive" breeds become bigger, tamer, less hardy, coarser fleeced, etc. If the only goal in heritage breed preservation is to preserve germplasm, that goal is best achieved in liquid nitrogen. Breeds should be preserved not for their looks or their pedigree, but for their purpose, in the environment in which they were intended to serve that purpose.

The Northeast seems to be ripe with barnyard flocks and herds with a menagerie of breeds from across the world. Not only does this present challenges with management, but it is also a leading cause of inconsistency in product quality. In the UK and other parts of the world, the idea of taking a breed that is "hefted" to a particular environment and raising it

elsewhere would be laughed at in the same way we might laugh at a person who uses a hammer on a screw. At the same time, some breeds have acclimated extremely well in new parts of the world, and have actually become more valuable in their new environment than they were where they originated. It's easy to tell when this is the case and when it isn't, but we need to make that assessment with objectivity and not emotion. The simple question is whether or not the animal is productive, with respect to the purpose or products for which it was domesticated and/or selected.

Importance to the bottom line Productivity should be the goal of every livestock producer, but it should be evaluated in terms of production efficiency. That means that a producer needs to consider not just productive outputs, but also the inputs that were required to produce them. If you provide an unrestricting nutrition and management environment, it is inefficient to raise animals that lack genetic potential for performance. At the same time, it is just as inefficient to raise animals with high genetic potential for performance in an environment that limits their ability to realize that potential.

It is also important to realize that the genes responsible for the production of one product are often antagonistic with the genes for another product. The more products you seek to raise from the same animal, the more challenging it will be to breed an animal that produces all of those products efficiently. Sheep and goats may not need to be selectively bred to the divergent extremes of beef vs. dairy cattle, or egg vs. meat chickens, but it is important to realize that if you are using Merinos or Alpines primarily for meat production, you are going to face certain inefficiencies that may compromise your profitability.

Good breeding is imperative Most "breeds" today include a huge variety of animals. To draw conclusions about animals based only on their breed would be considered racism in any other context. Our selection criteria need to be far more sophisticated than a single label. The key to finding the breed you need is to not only select a breed that fits your resources, products, and markets, but also to find a breeder who is dedicated to the same goals. Beware the difference between breeders and marketers. The breeder seeks to change their animals to better serve the needs of human society. The marketer seeks to change human culture to be more receptive to what they have to sell. If you want animals that work for you and not the other way around, seek animals that are bred to work.

At the end of the day, there is no magical breed that is right for everyone. The only universal rule is that if you are involved in commercial production, the best "breed" is a crossbred. More on that in the next installment of ***Breeding Matters***.

GRAZING: Smart pasture planning can yeild better crisis management

From Page 2

made us lazy. Previously the shepherd, rancher, or farmer had to work on a multi-pronged approach calling on many skills for prevention of parasite overload, unhealthy animals and death. So here we are, 40 years later, a full-blown, nearly worldwide resistance to the anthelmintics, looming ahead and revealing a severe short-sightedness to the idea that we might be able to eliminate parasites altogether. Nature, as always, has the stronger play. It's time to re-visit the strategies of pre-1960s in the context of the 21st Century.

As before, multiple approaches are needed. Genetics, good grazing practices, and a good understanding of the life cycles of the parasites and working with those cycles along with strong observation skills are the tools for the modern shepherd. In the world of genetics, it's important to keep those animals that have natural strength and resistance to parasites, and not those that require numerous interventions and care. Sometimes that means keeping your favorite animal is not the wisest choice. (Joe Emenheiser, UVM Extension Livestock Specialist, can educate, explain and elaborate on the finer points of this – and it deserves a full article of its own. See Page 10).

Meantime, good grazing management is your frontline proactive control of parasite impact on your flock or herd. Knowing how to work with the natural cycles of parasites – we can never eliminate them – so the next best thing is to figure out ways to work that benefits livestock and not the bugs.

Next topic: A look at some of the alternative worming substances and their effectiveness.

GET INVOLVED

This is a new section of the VSGA Newsletter dedicated to ways you can participate in our community and help serve and get to know other sheep and goat producers.

Newsletter Advertising Manager
Years ago, the newsletter sold ad space that helped pay for printing costs. We'd like to run advertisements again and we are looking for someone to collect ads from members and from any individual or business that may be beneficial to our membership. There is an opportunity to make a commission off selling ad space. If you are interested contact Mary Lake, (802) 338-2250, mary.m.lake@gmail.com and she can send you more information.

Wool Pool Volunteers
Be a part of the fun described in Katie Sullivan's article on Page 9. Wool Pool volunteers work together to do a range of jobs. You can be there for the whole day or just part of the day. Jobs include: unloading bags of wool from participant's vehicles onto a scale and then onto a truck, labeling bags or directing traffic. Whatever you do, you will be fed, hydrated and highly appreciated by VSGA! Contact Mary Lake if interested, (802)-338-2250 or mary.m.lake@gmail.com.

VSGA WOOL POOL & FLEECE SALE COLLECTION

The annual WOOL POOL will be held at VTC in Randolph on June 24. For more details visit VSGA Web site.
vtsheepandgoat.org

If you want to drop off wool for the pool contact Mary Lake ((802) 338-2250, mary.m.lake@gmail.com) with an estimated wool weight and she will give you a drop off time.

Contact Michael Hampton about sale fleeces. (802) 734-8615, mhampton@gmavt.net

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