

# Lamb Imports Top Discussion At Recent ASI Convention

**By Colleen Schreiber**  
DENVER — At the recent American Sheep Industry Association annual convention, attendees heard an update on what the organization has been doing on the lamb import front over the last 10 months.

Brad Boner, ASI president and Wyoming sheep producer, shared what he's learned while being on the front line of this issue. In April 2023, ASI received a letter from eight member states as well as the National Lamb Feeders Association requesting that ASI investigate the possibility of doing something about the ever increasing lamb import number.

Boner said the organization took that letter very seriously as it represented a big chunk of ASI's membership. The executive board immediately went to work looking into various Washington DC law firms that specialize in trade law. Two firms were interviewed with all the ASI executive board on a Zoom call for those interviews. Each firm offered a bid for each step of the process, and from that process ASI ultimately chose a firm to work with.

Boner explained that there are two steps in the trade case process, the first of which is an investigation.

"We first have to prove that we are injured," said Boner. "Then if we are successful at that phase, then we would move to the remedy phase."

He noted that both of the DC law firms that they interviewed recommended that the group pursue an anti-dumping investigation and a countervailing investigation.

"The definition of anti-dumping is when an importer is selling their product in your country, cheaper than they're selling it for in their country, or below their cost of production," Boner told the group. "It doesn't really have anything to do with the price they're selling it here. It has to do with the price in their home country."

A countervailing investigation involves finding out if the importing country is subsidizing their producers at any level.

The legal team first set out to gather data from the domestic industry. A survey was developed and sent out to members. Boner noted that the survey primarily focused on producers and lamb feeders in the eight states that had requested the investigation.

The survey was out for about six weeks and ASI and the attorneys conducted two Zoom calls for producers and feeders explaining the survey and its importance. All of the information gathered was confidential with only the law firm seeing the data. In the end those who turned in the survey represented about 10 percent of the total U.S. sheep inventory.

With that data in hand as well as some other economic data gathered from USDA, the law firm was able to determine the level of injury. Additionally, the law firm spent a lot of time looking into the countervailing side to see if there were any subsidies in Australia and New Zealand.

Boner further explained that the legal definition of material injury in this particular case is that imports have to be a portion of the reason the industry is suffering economically. The DC firm determined that the sheep industry could probably win the injury portion of a case though it was by no means a slam dunk, Boner said. However, while there was evidence of injury, the firm found no evidence in either country of subsidies. That meant that a countervailing case was out.

That took them then to the anti-dumping case. With evidence of injury in hand, they next looked to determine remedy. For this they looked at dumping margins, which is the difference in price in their country versus the price in the U.S.

"They found little evidence there," said Boner.

In fact, the best case scenario they found was a one to two percent difference in dumping margins.

"What that translates into is that the all the International Trade Commission could recommend as the remedy would be a one to two percent tariff," said Boner.

He further explained that as long as the U.S. price is within 30 percent of the imported product price, either Australia or New Zealand, the U.S. can keep its lamb market share.

"The only time we lose market share is when it goes above that 30 percent," he reiterated. "Basically a two percent margin will have no effect at all on the level of imports coming in."

Boner also pointed out that the attorney fees just for the investigation portion alone was to be about \$60,000 for one country which is what they decided on. However, the remedy phase was going to cost an additional \$1.3 million.

"After analyzing all that data, and the recommendations of the people with whom we trusted their knowledge of trade law, the six executive board members determined that a one to two percent dumping margin would probably have little to no impact on imports, and probably wasn't worth spending the \$1.3 million," Boner reiterated.

The executive committee also had the DC firm look into

the possibility of a 201 trade case. In this situation the injury level has a different legal term. It's called "substantial injury" which means that imports would have to be the cause of the injury.

"Our counsel was strongly convinced given what we had gathered that we could not reach that level of injury," said Boner.

The attorneys cited two main reasons for their assessment. First, COVID was in the middle of the three-year window. The second was that the boxed meat price for half of that period actually increased and for six months the price was at record levels.

"That was going to be a challenge for our case," Boner said.

The remedy phase of a 201 is also different in that the ITC and the Department of Commerce make a recommendation on injury level. That recommendation then goes to the presidential administration to determine if they're going to implement a remedy or not.

"They don't have to implement anything," he stressed.

It was also pointed out that the firm is on retainer for three years and they will continue to monitor things going forward.

"Given the resource commitment, and the amount of time, and energy it takes, it's our estimation that this industry really has one shot to get a tariff, and the stars have to line up. If that happens, we'll be happy to take that shot," Boner assured participants.

Peter Orwick, executive director of ASI, followed with additional comments on the

process noting first that as part of the effort, the board called a special information session, something that Orwick said he's never seen in his 30 years as the executive director.

"The reason being is they wanted individual outreach to the rest of the board to help with the education," Orwick said. "We spent 50 minutes with one of the top lawyers in the United States that deals with international trade. I think that just goes to the seriousness of trying to respond to folks, whether they were concerned with the price of lamb, or whether they were concerned with the inflation that it takes to produce that lamb."

Orwick also noted that this is not a new issue. In his work diary dating back to 1994, he had documented a phone call with a South Dakota producer

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to discuss the impact of lamb imports on the industry.

He also pointed out that the "Fresh American Lamb" label goes back decades to the 1960s.

"We were not competing with fresh American beef or fresh American pork, we were competing with imports even back then," said Orwick.

He also pointed to the 2012-13 market crash. The primary problem then was seasonality, meaning that even with the feedlot system there are times of the year when there are fewer lambs going through the system thus the lamb product on the shelf gets short and to maintain shelf space retailers often fill in the gap with imports.

"I'm not trying to take away

**See Lamb Imports Continued On Page 4**

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Lamb Imports
Continued From Page 3

from the import topic, but the seasonality issue is historic; it's endemic in the industry just as worries about the lack of tools available for predation management and about labor costs are," Orwick stressed. He also pointed out that this time around will be the third time in six years that the industry has gone through a preliminary investigation on imported lamb and the potential to bring a case. Speaking from experience, Orwick also told participants that pursuing a 201 trade case is "absolutely political. You can't do it as an amateur; you can't do it halfway, you have to believe in it, and you have to hire the people who can make the case, not just legally but politically." He added, because it is so political many law firms attempt an anti-dumping case first. "If you can show injury, then the U.S. government has to implement the case," said Or-

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wick. "They review every transaction between the Australian, New Zealand and U.S. companies for 12 months to determine what that dumping rate is. It's a massive undertaking." Additionally, the attorney who successfully won the 201 case for the lamb industry in 1998, recently told Orwick that going after another 201 trade case is not off the table, however the window for doing so is critical. "There were lots of problems with the window we were presenting them," Orwick reminded the group. Besides the two sticky issues that Boner pointed to, a third noted by Orwick is that the industry lost a major lamb company during that three-year period. "The absence of that company, and the amount of demand that went to imported product is just unquestionable," said Orwick. Another great example of what makes moving on another case difficult are H2-A herder wages particularly for the western range operations. "They're seeing the most dramatic increases to wages, and it is absolutely dramatic," he stressed. "It's the perfect document that a law firm will take and say, 'you know, your problem really isn't the price of Australian lamb, it's what your own government is doing to you in terms of wages.'" Add to that the dramatic increase in inflation at the farm/ranch level. Additionally the retail price of lamb could be used as another argument. Orwick said that the boxed lamb price from 2021 into Easter of 2022, the COVID

run-up, may well be the price producers need to cover the inflationary overhead costs at the farm gate, but as Orwick relayed that price may well be a price that consumers have a harder time paying. He shared how his local King Soopers, the week before Easter had six packages each of \$100 racks and \$80 legs. He went back three days after Easter and found the same six packages of each still in the meat case. "We went through Greek Easter, same six packages still sitting there; we went through Ramadan, that three week period, and all of it was still there," said Orwick. "I finally went back and bought everything for 50 percent off. So in my mind that says what the consumer is willing to pay, and I think we hit that number." He added that while producers need more out of that lamb price, a retail lamb price that can be maintained sustainably is critical. Orwick wrapped by applauding the work and the effort that the executive board put into the issue. Boner then wrapped the discussion by assuring participants that ASI's executive board will continue to watch the issue "like a hawk." "I also think we need not be shy in telling the importers that we have a lawyer on retainer. This is one of the issues that impacts sustainability of our industry, and we need to continue to figure out a solution. We've vetted a lot of things, and we will continue to do that. If they ever stub their toe and give us a window, we will be ready," Boner concluded.

Nations Feeder Cattle Moved Lower In This Week's Sales

ST. JOSEPH, Mo. — (US-DA-Jan. 16) — Compared to last week, steers and heifers sold \$3-10 lower. Light volume of trading fed cattle this week as packers continue to adjust harvest schedules as weather allows. Live sales of negotiated cash fed cattle trade in the Southern Plains were reported steady to \$1 lower at \$172. In Nebraska, live sales sold steady to \$2 lower at \$173, while the dressed sales sold 50 cents to \$2 lower at \$272-275. Choice boxed beef closed the week \$12.10 higher at \$289.26 while select was \$12.32 higher at \$271.85 for the same period. Weekly cattle slaughter under federal inspection estimated at 529,000, 25,000 higher than last week and 99,000 less than a year ago. Auction volume this week included 53 percent weighing over 600 pounds and 41 percent heifers. Auction receipts totaled 241,700 head, last week 180,900 head and last year 388,000 head. Texas 5200 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 350-399 lbs. \$313.72, 400-449 lbs. \$310.51, 450-499 lbs. \$289.57, 500-549 lbs. \$273.97, 550-599 lbs. \$265.88, 600-649 lbs. \$245.36, 650-699 lbs. \$237.09, 700-749 lbs. \$225.18, 750-799 lbs. \$220.32, 800-849 lbs. \$216.52, 850-899 lbs. \$214.88, 900-949 lbs. \$203.27; medium and large No. 1-2 400-449 lbs. \$284.33, 550-599 lbs. \$247.30, 600-649 lbs. \$232.03, 650-699 lbs. \$224.04, 700-749 lbs. \$204.65, 800-849 lbs. \$188, 850-899 lbs. \$203.93; heifers: medium and large No. 1 350-399 lbs. \$282.31, 400-449 lbs. \$260.27, 450-499 lbs. \$251.64, 500-549 lbs. \$240.16, 550-599 lbs. \$227.87, 600-649 lbs. \$217.60, 650-699 lbs. \$214.94, 700-749 lbs. \$212.20, 750-799 lbs. \$205.02, 800-849 lbs. \$197.07, 850-899 lbs. \$180.95; medium and large No. 1-2 450-499 lbs. \$247.41, 500-549 lbs. \$224.15, 550-599 lbs. \$223.01, 600-649 lbs. \$207.44, 800-849 lbs. \$188.44. Oklahoma 34,900 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs. \$350.27, 350-399 lbs. \$336.62, 400-449 lbs. \$328.99, 450-499 lbs. \$306.97, 500-549 lbs. \$289.61, 550-599 lbs. \$275.22, 600-649 lbs. \$248.96, 650-699 lbs. \$236.98, 700-749 lbs. \$223.28, 750-799 lbs. \$218.15, 800-849 lbs. \$215.56, 850-899 lbs. \$210.17, 900-949 lbs. \$203.95, 950-999 lbs. \$202.18, 1050-1099 lbs. \$182.50; medium and large No. 1-2 350-399 lbs. \$296.63, 400-449 lbs. \$288.25, 450-499 lbs. \$265.79, 500-549 lbs. \$262.20, 550-599 lbs. \$256.09, 600-649 lbs. \$230.42, 650-699 lbs. \$225.81, 700-749 lbs. \$217.68, 750-799 lbs. \$210.55, 800-849 lbs. \$206.73, 850-899 lbs. \$204.18, 900-949 lbs. \$195.54, 950-999 lbs. \$193.56; heifers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs. \$274.34, 350-399 lbs. \$284.86, 400-449 lbs. \$269.05, 450-499 lbs. \$256.45, 500-549 lbs. \$235.38, 550-599 lbs. \$227.68, 600-649 lbs. \$220.86, 650-699 lbs. \$215.43, 700-749 lbs. \$206.16, 750-799 lbs. \$197.97, 800-849 lbs. \$194.53, 850-899 lbs. \$194.63, 900-949 lbs.

\$185, 950-999 lbs. \$185.62; medium and large No. 1-2 250-299 lbs. \$268.23, 350-399 lbs. \$245.66, 400-449 lbs. \$240.13, 450-499 lbs. \$237.40, 500-549 lbs. \$214.98, 550-599 lbs. \$223.28, 600-649 lbs. \$210.14, 650-699 lbs. \$203.73, 700-749 lbs. \$194.03, 750-799 lbs. \$194.34, 850-899 lbs. \$175, 950-999 lbs. \$170.18. New Mexico 4100 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 250-299 lbs. \$323.36, 350-399 lbs. \$312.39, 400-449 lbs. \$292.15, 450-499 lbs. \$270.42, 500-549 lbs. \$258.70, 550-599 lbs. \$244.57, 600-649 lbs. \$237.84, 650-699 lbs. \$226.98, 700-749 lbs. \$214.21, 750-799 lbs. \$209.10; medium and large No. 1-2 350-399 lbs. \$266.82, 400-449 lbs. \$269.52, 450-499 lbs. \$248.34, 500-549 lbs. \$232.89; heifers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs. \$273.25, 350-399 lbs. \$268.13, 400-449 lbs. \$255.17, 450-499 lbs. \$254.32, 500-549 lbs. \$242.39, 550-599 lbs. \$230.50, 600-649 lbs. \$220.52, 650-699 lbs. \$214.35, 700-749 lbs. \$212.77, 750-799 lbs. \$200.91, 800-849 lbs. \$182.92; medium and large No. 1-2 350-399 lbs. \$225.66. Kansas 2400 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 450-499 lbs. \$285.70, 550-599 lbs. \$285.12, 600-649 lbs. \$250.44, 650-699 lbs. \$227.39, 700-749 lbs. \$228.54, 750-799 lbs. \$222.98, 800-849 lbs. \$222.04, 850-899 lbs. \$215.17, 900-949 lbs. \$211.55, 950-999 lbs. \$198.02; heifers: medium and large No. 1 500-549 lbs. \$259.34, 550-599 lbs. \$248.45, 600-649 lbs. \$222.34, 650-699 lbs. \$213.17, 700-749 lbs. \$200.40, 800-849 lbs. \$205. Missouri 25,000 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs. \$308.33, 350-

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# WS Update Wolf, Black Vulture Predation At Annual Sheep Meet

**By Colleen Schreiber**  
DENVER — At the recent American Sheep Industry Association annual convention, those attending the resource management council and policy forum heard an update from USDA-Wildlife Services. The update was wide-ranging and included everything from work underway for predator management of black vultures, wolves and coyotes as well as ongoing research both lethal and non-lethal.

Keith Wehner, regional director for WSs' eastern region, first reminded participants that there are some large differences between the West and the East in terms of WS ability to manage predators. He stressed that WS has been operating in the western part of the U.S. for well over 100 years. In the East, it's only been since 1987. "The traditional livestock protection that covers almost every western state really doesn't exist in the same format in the East. In fact, the only place that it's the same as in the West is in West

Virginia and Virginia," Wehner told participants.

In the early 1990s, there were some pretty significant livestock protection directives established in those states. Those directives have since been lost though WS still maintains a cooperative agreement there. Most of the funding for management and control of their three primary predator problems, coyotes, bears and black vultures, comes from the state with a smaller portion coming from WS.

Currently, black vultures are a particularly hot topic in the East as they've expanded their range over the last 30 years. Traditionally a Gulf Coast migratory bird, the black vulture can now be found as far north as Michigan, he told the group. Unlike the turkey vulture, which is largely solitary and almost exclusively eats from dead carcasses, black vultures don't wait till something's dead. They kill it.

"They're learning from one another how to kill livestock," said Wehner. "We see it every

day, and it's really becoming a problem."

They tend to focus first on pecking out the eyes of newborns and there may be 20 or 30 vultures working on that one baby and its mother can't fight off that many predatory birds at one time, he said. Other times, they'll torment the cow while she's having her calf.

"The birds will chew up the cow's rear end while she's giving birth," said Wehner. "Then they eat the afterbirth and attack the baby, usually as it's being born."

Sometimes the young are born alive but with their eyes already ripped out.

"It's a lot more brutal and more inhumane than what I've seen wolves or even bears do," he opined.

He also noted that these birds don't just cause big problems for farmers and ranchers.

"We might get 100 vultures on a cell phone tower or a transmission tower and when they're spooked, the first thing they do is crap and the next thing we know is their excrement has caused a million-dollar power outage."

Airports also face challenges because of these birds.

"The Department of Defense has a huge interest as well," said Wehner. "They've

lost aircraft to black vultures along the coast."

He also told participants that these birds love any petroleum-based product. They've been known to rip up a brand-new asphalt roof as well as windshield wipers and all the caulking around a vehicle windshield. Also, on billboards, the birds walk the top and literally peck at the plastic sheeting until it is hanging in the wind.

"Three-quarters of my states are dealing with this issue," said Wehner. "We provided operational assistance in 26 states."

While the birds are easy to trap by putting a roadkill deer in a trap that draws in 100 birds at a time, the problem is there are millions across the landscape. Additionally, because of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, WS is limited in what they can really do. WS has to get a permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service before they can do anything at all.

There is ongoing research to better understand some alternative prevention tools everything from lasers to effigy placement on transmission lines, even inflatable scarecrows.

"These things only work for a short time because the birds are smart and they learn quickly," said Wehner.

Researchers are trying to better understand movement across the landscape, how they interact across the landscape, what they target as well as how the birds respond to trapping and or harassment. They're doing survival studies as well.

"These birds don't have any natural predators so if a young bird doesn't die in the first six months, they're believed to live 10 to 15 years," Wehner told the group.

Some birds are even being equipped with GPS collars to help in the various studies. Research has also shown that the vultures prefer red, green and black colored vehicles.

"They don't like white though I have no idea why," said Wehner.

Wendy Anderson, who is the new head of the Western division for WS, reiterated that livestock protection from predators is a foundational mission. However, congressional appropriations only cover about 45 percent of WS operations. The remainder comes through cooperative funding.

Anderson said that in 2023 WS assisted sheep producers in 32 states with the top states being Nevada, Texas, California and Montana. The top five predators taken were coyotes, mountain lions, black bears, black vultures and feral hogs.

"Wildlife Services legally removed over 400 black bears, six grizzly bears, over 200 mountain lions, almost 300 gray wolves and over 68,600 coyotes in 2023 for the protection of livestock," Anderson told participants.

She also shared an update on the ongoing issue with the use of the M44 device on BLM lands. She explained that in 2023, the Center for Biological Diversity sent a letter and a petition asking BLM to stop the use of M44s on BLM lands.

"The letter claimed that the M44 is a danger to the public's pets and threatened and endangered species," said Anderson.

The letter also made an indirect reference to HR 4951, which seeks a ban of M44s on all public lands. The petition attached to the letter was signed by the Center for Biological Diversity, Predator Defense and 70 over NGOs.

WS responded by providing background and safety information on the device itself and the sodium cyanide capsules as well as information about the agencies' use of M44s on both public and private lands. Additionally, WS leadership met with BLM to further discuss the issue and stress the importance of continued use of the device on BLM lands.

"Unfortunately, in August of 2023, the BLM director decided to disallow use of all M44s with cyanide capsules on any BLM land," she told the group.

In November 2023, the BLM and WS revised their MOU to state that no M44s would be used on BLM lands.

"This could change with a different administration," she said.

Anderson also offered an update on livestock protection dogs. In mid-2023, WS ran out of stock on both the public and private land versions of the educational signs used to advise those recreating that they may encounter livestock protection dogs or sheep. In early conversations between Wildlife Services staff and wool growers, the signs were deemed incredibly important and valued by livestock producers. However, there was mixed feedback regarding the messaging on the signs and the photographs used, said Anderson.

Thus, Wildlife Services' leadership worked with ASI on updating the signs. ASI secured the funding and volunteers to handle the printing and the new inventory of signs going forward. They are nearing completion.

Anderson also talked about WS standards of evidence in conducting livestock lost investigations pertaining to Mexican wolves in Arizona and New Mexico.

"Wildlife Services has always believed subcutaneous hemorrhaging with underlying tissue damage from bite marks to be the de facto standard for

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10th Annual Spring Brangus Bull Sale


THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2024 - 10 a.m.

Jordan Cattle Auction, San Saba, TX


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PRODUCING CONSISTENT AND PREDICTABLE HIGH QUALITY CALF CROPS




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✓ Functionally Balanced and Complete Phenotype:

• Moderate Mature Cow Weight & Frame • Digestive Capacity • Fleshing Ability • Thickness

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✓ Functionally Balanced and Complete Genomic EPD Profile

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depredation investigations across the U.S.,” Anderson told the group. “In New Mexico and Arizona, unfortunately, we realized inconsistency had developed over time in the way we were conducting our depredation investigations.”

That led WS to implement standards of evidence informally in 2020. In July 2022 WS began the process of establishing standards in writing for determining Mexican wolf predation. The goal was to ensure there are written, science-based standards in Arizona and New Mexico that are consistent with how WS manages wolf depredations throughout the U.S. and that all involved parties have a clear understanding of the physical evidence required at the time of an investigation to make depredation determinations.

WS received comments on the development of these written standards from stakeholders, including several groups representing livestock producers. Those standards were finalized in August 2023.

“According to all research and state established standards, of which we are aware, the presence of subcutaneous hemorrhage and underlying tissue damage is the core standard to confirm wolf predation,” Anderson reiterated. “The physical evidence must indicate that the animal was alive when bitten by the wolf and that the wolf bites are not associated with scavenging of an animal that was already dead.”

She added that U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service agreed with the new written standards of evidence and WS investigation process will be helpful in terms of their issuance of management actions. With the new written standards in place, last year New Mexico and Arizona confirmations were right in line with the Northern Rocky Mountain confirmations, Anderson said. “Our confirmations in Arizona and New Mexico haven’t decreased,” she added. “We’re staying right in line, so I feel like we’re doing a good job with these new standards.”

She also told participants that there was an inspection done by the Office of Inspector General through USDA to determine whether WS uses a consistent approach for its depredation reports, and consistent support for those reports regarding livestock loss attributed to Mexican wolves in New Mexico and Arizona. OIG found that Wildlife Services approach was consistent, but that supporting evidence was not always consistent. In a final report, OIG provided WS with three recommendations with specific deadlines. Those recommendations included implementing agency policy that clearly describes photographic support requirements for depredation reports; establishment of training on the agency policy including detailed photographic requirements for depredation investigators and reviewers and finally a formal request to the Mexican wolf executive committee to review and make any applicable updates to its standard operating procedures. WS implemented all three recommendations by the due dates, Anderson said.

“This inspection is considered closed, and with the standards of evidence, we feel we have a better path forward with the USFWS on depredation investigations.”

Finally, Anderson offered an update on WS’s participation in the reintroduction of gray wolves in Colorado. Colorado Parks and Wildlife released 10 gray wolves, all from Oregon, in Colorado pursuant to a 2020 state referendum that required reintroduction of the endangered grey wolf by December 2023. Specifically on December 18, CPW released five wolves onto public land in Grand County and another five a few days later onto an undisclosed area in Grand and Summit Counties.

She noted that in November, the USFWS released a final rule establishing that the release would be designated under the ESA section 10(j) as an experimental population.

“This designates management flexibility that may include management action to address both impacts on people or livestock,” said Anderson.

She also pointed out that the reintroduced wolves from Oregon are not the only wolves in Colorado. In 2021, wolves from Wyoming wandered into Colorado. They remain in Colorado.

Anderson told participants that currently WS is only participating as a member of the CPW Technical Working Group. The working group contributes expertise towards developing conservation objectives, management strategies, damage, present prevention, and conservation planning for wolves in Colorado, she explained. However, if WS is doing a depredation investigation and there is a possibility that it could be caused by a wolf, WS has to step back and contact CPW to do the investigation.

“If CPW and USFWS decide they want our assistance with depredation investigations in the future, we’ll have to enter into some MOU to do that,” Anderson said. “So right now, WS has very little impact or assistance with the Colorado wolves, but hopefully that will change in the future. Right now, it’s very political.”

Questioned why WS has not taken a more active role, Anderson responded by explaining that it’s the state who has thus far been reluctant to allow WS an MOU to be part of depredation investigations. Additionally, it was pointed out by WS’s Wehner, who previously served as the western director, that the reason WS has been so involved with wolves in other states is because in these states wolves were originally introduced as threatened or endangered species. However, in Colorado, citizens passed a referendum saying they wanted wolves.

“They’re a totally different beast in Colorado,” Wehner told participants.

Referring to it as a “powder keg” he too acknowledged that it’s very political with different personalities at play in the governor’s office and different agencies.

There was considerable more discussion about all things wolf and in particular about the depredation investigation process and the standards of evidence for wolf depredation.

Cat Urbigkit, Wyoming producer and vice president of Wyoming Wool Growers Assn., commented that the livestock industry has “a pretty big issue” with the standards of evidence that WS has adopted.

“A strict reading of those standards indicate there would rarely be a confirmed depredation,” Urbigkit insisted. “And realize that our compensation is dependent upon that designation.”

She added the whole issue has caused a huge rift between livestock producers and WS.

“It’s put us on a very bad path with each other right now ... I would just be very cautious. We just went through this process for WS to develop these written standards that we sure as hell don’t want to see happen in any other state,” Urbigkit stressed.

Dustin Ranglack, Utah field station leader for the National Wildlife Research Center, also shared an update regarding ongoing research at the Fort Collins, Colorado, facility starting with the PAPP toxicant, an oral toxicant being tested for coyotes.

“Basically, it functions very similarly to sodium cyanide in that it reduces the body’s ability to deliver oxygen to the tissues,” Ranglack explained.

He acknowledged that while it’s very humane and fast acting it is a bit slower than sodium cyanide. Specifically, it takes about 20 to 30 minutes before a coyote, for example, actually succumbs to the toxicant.

“We’ve tested a lot of different doses and settled in at about 400 milligrams as the appropriate dose for coyotes,” he told participants.

It’s delivered via a spring loaded ejector device, essentially an M44 rebranded a bit.

The big difference between PAPP and sodium cyanide is there is a potential for an anti-

dote for accidental exposure to a companion dog or a working dog, for example. However, researchers are struggling a bit on the delivery mechanism for the antidote, so it remains a work in progress.

There are several different non-lethal tools being investigated as well including fladry and fencing, and a newer project underway includes the use of flashing eartags for livestock. NWRC put out about

January 25, 2024

Livestock Weekly

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1700 flash tags in nine different states in 2021. What they generally found is that livestock producers using the tags reported a reduction in predation between

years and also between neighbors and more are interested in trying them or continuing to use them.

See WS Update  
Continued On Page 6



## SPECIAL STOCKER AND FEEDER SALE

Thursday, February 1 @ 11:00 A.M. | San Saba

*In Conjunction With Our Regular Sale.*

*Trophies Will Be Awarded To Our Champions And Reserve Champions In Each Breed*

*Offering Weaned and Non-Weaned Calves and Yearlings.*

### Early Offerings Include:

- **41** weaned calves — true F-1 tigerstripe steers with the balance being ¼ bloods (out of black F-1 cows and Hereford bulls), all been weaned for 120 days, two rounds of ViraShield 6 and wormed.
- **83** Angus calves, weaned on October 8, two rounds of Modified live vaccine, weight 550+ pounds.
- **35** black and black baldy calves, weight 500-600 pounds, two rounds of Pyramid 5, weaned September 15.
- **12** Angus cross calves, weaned for 45+ days, two rounds of Nasalgen 3PMH, Covexin 8 and pour on wormer.
- **55** Angus cross and Charolais cross calves, weight 450-650 pounds, weaned on July 1, one round of Triangle 5 and BoviShield Gold, then two rounds of BlackLeg and wormed.
- **68** Angus / Maine cross calves, weight 550-675 pounds.
- **35** black and black baldy calves, weaned for 60 days, given Vista Once.

## SPECIAL BULL OFFERING

Thursday, February 8 @ 10:00 A.M. | San Saba

*In Conjunction With Our Regular Sale. Bulls Will Sell At 10:00 A.M.*

*Bulls Will Be Fertility Tested, Meet Trich Requirements, And Ready To Go To Work.*

*Featuring Martin-Bruni Brangus and STS Ranger Registered Angus Bulls*

*Over 55 Head Consigned!*

*Consignments Include: 25 Angus, 20 Brangus, 7 Hereford, 3 Limflex, 1 Limousin, 1 Red Angus & Others*

### Martin-Bruni Brangus — 18 Brangus Bulls

- **18** virgin, registered eighteen to nineteen month old Brangus bulls, stacked generations of purebred Brinks Brangus genetics. The bull’s genetics have proven to produce consistent and predictable high quality calf crops. Bulls are sound footed, high volume, thick muscled and docile. They have been mated to balance growth strength with maternal traits for building a cow herd. Registration papers will be transferred at seller’s expense. Bulls will be available for viewing beginning Friday, February 3 at the auction. Consigned by Martin- Bruni Brangus. Performance data and EPD’s will be available on our website. This is the 10th Annual Spring Martin-Bruni Brangus Bull Sale. (1)

### STS Ranger Registered Angus — 12 Angus Bulls

- **12** choice, registered, virgin Angus bulls, eighteen to nineteen months old. This registered herd was started about thirteen years ago with a lot of Gardiner influenced genetics. Registrations papers will be transferred by owner. Bulls are all freeze branded for identification. Very good set of bulls coming from STS Ranger Registered Angus Ranch. (Stran Smith and Jay Foster). For EPD’s and videos of the bulls go to our website. (2)

- **2** registered Brangus bulls, virgin, twenty to twenty-three months old — one bull is AI sired by American Legacy (BW 68, EPD’s BW 2.4, WW 29, YW 56, Milk 4, TM 19) and the other goes back to Mound Creek (BW 67, EPD’s BW 0, WW 26, YW 51, Milk 7, TM 20) bloodlines, will be tested and ready for work for you. Bulls are consigned by Jason Katcsmorak of Leming, Texas. (3)
- **3** virgin, registered black Limflex bulls, coming off Schur Limousin Cattle — two are eighteen to nineteen months old, one is twenty-seven months old, both double polled and double black. If you are looking for bulls to add pounds and value to your calf crop then don’t miss these! (4)
- **1** virgin, registered black Limousin bull, eighteen months old, coming off of Schur Limousin Cattle. (5)
- **1** virgin, registered Angus bull, eighteen months old, consigned by Schur Limousin Cattle, tested and ready to go to work for you. (6)
- **1** virgin, registered Red Angus bull, eighteen months old, coming off Square Bales LLC of Florence. (7)
- **1** virgin Red Angus / Simmental cross bull, eighteen months old, consigned by Square Bales LLC of Florence. (8)
- **2** registered polled Hereford bulls, coming two year olds, sired by Churchill Rock 646D ET and NJW 73S 10W Honest 74F ET — one is a high growth bull, and the other is a calving ease bull, consigned by Fracta Via Land & Cattle. (9)
- **10** Angus bulls, coming two year olds, young herd sires, raised in West Texas, will be rugged and hard footed, will be able to go anywhere, consigned by JB Cattle. (10)
- **5** horned Hereford bulls, eighteen to twenty months old, big boned, high growth bulls, raised in West Texas, consigned by JB Cattle. (11)
- **1** Brangus bull, two years past, big, stout Brangus bull, can go to the big pasture and cover a lot of cows, consigned by JB Cattle. (12)
- **1** registered Brangus bull, raised by Hickory Sands Ranch, young coming two year old virgin, big and stout, consigned by JC Ranch. (13)

*For details on the bull sale or online viewing/bidding info, please call or visit our website.*

## EARLY SPRING REPLACEMENT FEMALE SALE

Saturday, February 17 @ 10:00 A.M. | San Saba

*Consignments Welcome!*

*For details on the female sale or online viewing/bidding info, please call or visit our website.*

### Internet Guidelines:

View it live and bid online (or by phone at 325/372-5159) or give us a call and we will assist you with your purchases. If you have previously registered to buy with us online, click the “live auction” button on our website and log in, but if you have not previously registered to buy with us for our online sales, **please do so at least two days prior to the sale.** For instructions, go to our website and click on “internet sales”. If you have any questions when you get to cattleusa.com go to the help center tab. If you need additional assistance, please call or email us. A running order will be posted on our website the evening before the sale.

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WS Update  
Continued From Page 5

NWRC also has some quantitative data on a band of sheep with tags and a band without from the same area.

“We showed that it cut depredations by about one half with the flashing tags,” said Ranglack.

The research is now under peer review with the next step being publication.

He also mentioned that one of the issues with the flash tags is durability. Thus, they’re in the process of working with Colorado State University on a design that they could then take to an eartag production company to produce and eventually sell commercially.

Responding to a comment that predators adapt to all of these tools like fladry, Ranglack acknowledged that there is a habituation rate.

“There’s never going to be a silver bullet.”

However, he also opined that predators may be slower to habituate to flashing eartags than a static device, say a light on a fencepost, for example.

Ranglack is also working with another potential tool in Oregon. Specifically, he’s using thermal imaging on a drone to detect wolves before they come into areas being grazed by cattle. The drone can also be used to chase away the wolves. Here too, he acknowledged there are definitely limitations.

Finally, Ranglack told participants that some producers in Texas say they now have more predator problems from caracaras than coyotes. To reckon with all of the avian predator issues, when the federal budgeting process finally gets worked out, one of the new hires will be an avian predator scientist at their Utah station to work on eagles, caracara and raven issues.

Man needs, for his happiness, not only the enjoyment of this or that, but hope and enterprise and change. — *Bertrand Russell*.

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Nations Feeder Cattle Traded Higher In This Week’s Sales

ST. JOSEPH, Mo. — (US-DA-Jan. 22) — Compared to last week, steers and heifers sold \$4-10 higher, getting back the losses from the previous week.

Preliminary 2023 yearly cattle slaughter rates suggest a 4.2 percent less slaughter than a year ago and 2.3 percent below the previous three-year average. The most reduction in slaughter percentage wise was beef cow slaughter 11 percent lower (about 440,000 head) than the previous year while steer harvest was 5.1 percent less (around 800,000). An interesting note is the 2023 steer harvest total (around 15 million head) would be the lowest steer total in 50-plus years.

In recent weeks, ranchers in the Southern Plains are looking to restock their limited cow herds recently and have made their way to the Northern Plains to get some bred females. Light volume of fed cattle trading this week again as packers

continue to adjust harvest schedules as weather allows.

Live sales of negotiated cash fed cattle trade in the Southern Plains were reported \$1-1.50 higher at \$173-173.50. In Nebraska, live sales sold steady at \$173, while the dressed sales sold unevenly steady at \$273-274.

Choice boxed beef closed the week \$6.24 higher at \$295.50 while select was \$11.20 higher at \$283.05 for the same period.

Weekly cattle slaughter under federal inspection estimated at 617,000, 71,000 higher than last week and 30,000 less than a year ago.

Auction volume this week included 55 percent weighing over 600 pounds and 42 percent heifers.

*Auction receipts totaled 96,900 head, last week 241,700 head, last year 267,000 head.*

Texas 4400 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs. \$328.82, 400-449 lbs. \$332.02, 450-499 lbs. \$305.82, 500-549 lbs. \$278.61, 550-599 lbs. \$266.75, 600-649 lbs. \$257.99, 650-699 lbs. \$236.43, 700-749 lbs. \$231.19, 750-799 lbs. \$228.39, 800-849 lbs. \$222.87, 850-899 lbs. \$216.98; medium and large No. 1-2 750-799 lbs. \$219.18; heifers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs. \$287.51, 350-399 lbs. \$281.72, 400-449 lbs. \$268.66, 450-499 lbs. \$265.09, 500-549 lbs. \$248.08, 550-599 lbs. \$242.03, 600-649 lbs. \$229.43, 650-699 lbs. \$223.39, 700-749 lbs. \$219.31, 750-799 lbs. \$210.73, 800-849 lbs.

\$204.15; medium and large No. 1-2 400-449 lbs. \$220.29, 450-499 lbs. \$239.61, 700-749 lbs. \$210, 750-799 lbs. \$202.50.

Oklahoma 1700 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 450-499 lbs. \$310.49, 500-549 lbs. \$302.23, 550-599 lbs. \$275.10, 600-649 lbs. \$247.21, 650-699 lbs. \$237.86, 700-749 lbs. \$226.24, 750-799 lbs. \$224.99, 950-999 lbs. \$205.87; medium and large No. 1-2 550-599 lbs. \$236.91, 600-649 lbs. \$234.48; heifers: medium and large No. 1 450-499 lbs. \$249.03, 500-549 lbs. \$238.84, 550-599 lbs. \$232.03, 600-649 lbs. \$218.88, 650-699 lbs. \$218.48, 700-749 lbs. \$209.25, 800-849 lbs. \$202; medium and large No. 1-2 400-449 lbs. \$246.63, 450-499 lbs. \$238.64, 550-599 lbs. \$216.42, 600-649 lbs. \$212.54.

New Mexico 4100 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 250-299 lbs. \$347.83, 300-349 lbs. \$336.72, 350-399 lbs. \$320.25, 400-449 lbs. \$315.55, 450-499 lbs. \$276.58, 500-549 lbs. \$256.90, 550-599 lbs. \$254.84, 600-649 lbs. \$243, 650-699 lbs. \$231.31, 700-749 lbs. \$215.15, 750-799 lbs. \$224.66, 800-849 lbs. \$209.36; medium and large No. 1-2 350-399 lbs. \$251.44, 400-449 lbs. \$264.68; heifers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs. \$286.80, 350-399 lbs. \$276.04, 400-449 lbs. \$254.72, 450-499 lbs. \$252.03, 500-549 lbs. \$236.47, 550-599 lbs. \$226.27, 600-649 lbs. \$217.65, 700-749 lbs. \$204.27, 800-849 lbs. \$181.93; medium and large No. 1-2 300-349 lbs. \$248.53, 400-449 lbs. \$225.25.

Kansas 3600 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 450-499 lbs. \$331.33, 500-549 lbs. \$327.30, 550-599 lbs. \$295.50, 600-649 lbs. \$273.15, 650-699 lbs. \$261.59, 700-749 lbs. \$244.29, 750-799 lbs. \$234.59, 800-849 lbs. \$229.68, 850-899 lbs. \$221.89, 900-949 lbs. \$214.45, 950-999 lbs. \$215.52; heifers: medium and large No.

1 400-449 lbs. \$277.58, 450-499 lbs. \$261.34, 500-549 lbs. \$252.43, 550-599 lbs. \$261.60, 600-649 lbs. \$233.68, 650-699 lbs. \$220.14, 700-749 lbs. \$212.39, 750-799 lbs. \$211.50, 800-849 lbs. \$209.15, 850-899 lbs. \$207.70.

Missouri 5700 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 450-499 lbs. \$308.80, 500-549 lbs. \$292.24, 550-599 lbs. \$276.19, 600-649 lbs. \$255.69, 650-699 lbs. \$246.73, 700-749 lbs. \$237.77, 750-799 lbs. \$231.27, 800-849 lbs. \$227.50, 900-949 lbs. \$218.05, 950-999 lbs. \$205.15; heifers: medium and large No. 1 400-449 lbs. \$264.30, 450-499 lbs. \$259.73, 500-549 lbs. \$249.62, 550-599 lbs. \$231.50, 600-649 lbs. \$230.38, 650-699 lbs. \$223.37, 700-749 lbs. \$220.14, 750-799 lbs. \$210.64.

Iowa 13,300 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 350-399 lbs. \$320.04, 400-449 lbs. \$313.56, 450-499 lbs. \$298.42, 500-549 lbs. \$291.60, 550-599 lbs. \$282.61, 600-649 lbs. \$272.37, 650-699 lbs. \$255.84, 700-749 lbs. \$242.78, 750-799 lbs. \$232.16, 800-849 lbs. \$225.25, 850-899 lbs. \$220.24, 900-949 lbs. \$212.21, 950-999 lbs. \$189.66; heifers: medium and large No. 1 350-399 lbs. \$282.80, 400-449 lbs. \$266.88, 450-499 lbs. \$254.87, 500-549 lbs. \$248.44, 550-599 lbs. \$242.51, 600-649 lbs. \$233.62, 650-699 lbs. \$228.28, 700-749 lbs. \$214.54, 750-799 lbs. \$211.77, 800-849 lbs. \$206.01, 850-899 lbs. \$193.90.

Nebraska 20,000 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 350-399 lbs. \$384, 400-449 lbs. \$359.92, 450-499 lbs. \$326.82, 500-549 lbs. \$323.64, 550-599 lbs. \$302.71, 600-649 lbs. \$290.37, 650-699 lbs. \$264.31, 700-749 lbs. \$252.44, 750-799 lbs. \$242.32, 800-849 lbs. \$234.82, 850-899 lbs. \$221.58, 900-949 lbs. \$221.16, 1000-1049 lbs. \$207.06, 1050-1099 lbs. \$196.84; heifers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs.



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**Keith Osbourn**

806/632-7267

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**Matt Addison**

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\$344.06, 350-399 lbs. \$320.39, 400-449 lbs. \$314.86, 450-499 lbs. \$300.41, 500-549 lbs. \$288.50, 550-599 lbs. \$268.86, 600-649 lbs. \$254.22, 650-699 lbs. \$240.78, 700-749 lbs. \$224.68, 750-799 lbs. \$219.42, 800-849 lbs. \$212.22, 850-899 lbs. \$209.05.

Colorado 6900 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 350-399 lbs. \$371.92, 400-449 lbs. \$353.57, 450-499 lbs. \$337.10, 500-549 lbs. \$310.96, 550-599 lbs. \$289.39, 600-649 lbs. \$281.12, 650-699 lbs. \$252.61, 700-749 lbs. \$243.30, 750-799 lbs. \$233.38, 800-849 lbs. \$219.79, 850-899 lbs. \$208.80, 950-999 lbs. \$194.79; heifers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs. \$299.11, 350-399 lbs. \$292.36, 400-449 lbs. \$280.90, 450-499 lbs. \$292.48, 500-549 lbs. \$259.90, 550-599 lbs. \$247.42, 600-649 lbs. \$236.18, 650-699 lbs. \$233.75, 700-749 lbs. \$212.36, 750-799 lbs. \$202.65, 800-849 lbs. \$197.35, 850-899 lbs. \$191.25, 900-949 lbs. \$188.26.

Wyoming 2300 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 350-399 lbs. \$387.50, 400-449 lbs. \$366.95, 450-499 lbs. \$335, 500-549 lbs. \$316.77, 550-599 lbs. \$294.32, 600-649 lbs. \$287.42, 650-699 lbs. \$271.46, 700-749 lbs. \$244.51, 750-799 lbs. \$239.83; heifers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs. \$344, 400-449 lbs. \$323.70, 450-499 lbs. \$313.56, 500-549 lbs. \$286.45, 550-599 lbs. \$275, 600-649 lbs. \$260.74, 650-699 lbs. \$233.95, 700-749 lbs. \$218.35, 750-799 lbs. \$213.

South Dakota 11,700 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 400-449 lbs. \$337.51, 450-499 lbs. \$316.22, 500-549 lbs. \$313.29, 550-599 lbs. \$303.27, 600-649 lbs. \$278.32, 650-699 lbs. \$261.66, 700-749 lbs. \$248.55, 750-799 lbs. \$241.17, 800-849 lbs. \$229.68, 850-899 lbs. \$224.55, 900-949 lbs. \$212.11, 950-999 lbs. \$210.80; heifers: medium and large No. 1 350-399 lbs. \$294.36, 400-449 lbs. \$288.89, 450-499 lbs. \$283.59, 500-549 lbs. \$279.70, 550-599 lbs. \$262.20, 600-649 lbs. \$240.48, 650-699 lbs. \$232.72, 700-749 lbs. \$223.40, 750-799 lbs. \$212.99, 800-849 lbs. \$205.27, 850-899 lbs. \$203.14, 900-949 lbs. \$200.02.

North Dakota 1900 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 400-449 lbs. \$342.39, 450-499 lbs. \$337.13, 500-549 lbs. \$308.31, 550-599 lbs. \$291.49, 600-649 lbs. \$276.74, 650-699 lbs. \$259.91, 700-749 lbs. \$247.63, 750-799 lbs. \$247.11, 800-849 lbs. \$231.81; heifers: medium and large No. 1 400-449 lbs. \$294.93, 500-549 lbs. \$264.80, 550-599 lbs. \$254.54, 600-649 lbs. \$255.13, 650-699 lbs. \$242.21, 700-749 lbs. \$223.53, 800-849 lbs. \$209.

Montana 1600 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 450-499 lbs. \$332.96, 500-549 lbs. \$314.96, 550-599 lbs. \$299.31, 600-649 lbs. \$295.19, 650-699 lbs. \$283.07, 700-749 lbs. \$254.58, 800-849 lbs. \$229.94; heifers: medium and large No. 1 450-499 lbs. \$299.42, 500-549 lbs. \$297.41, 550-599 lbs. \$278.02, 600-649 lbs. \$261.60, 650-699 lbs. \$238.90.

Virginia 1400 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 450-499 lbs. \$262.48, 550-599 lbs. \$245.07, 600-649 lbs. \$229.59, 700-749 lbs. \$213.23; heifers: medium and large No. 1 350-399 lbs. \$186.83, 400-449 lbs. \$191.99, 450-499 lbs. \$200.16, 500-549 lbs. \$197.59, 550-599 lbs. \$192.66, 600-649 lbs. \$179.37.

South Carolina 1500 head. Heifers: medium and large

No. 1 350-399 lbs. \$224.68, 400-449 lbs. \$220.94, 450-499 lbs. \$220.63, 500-549 lbs. \$207.01.

North Carolina 1700 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 350-399 lbs. \$244.02, 400-449 lbs. \$250.01, 450-499 lbs. \$245.68, 500-549 lbs. \$238.31, 550-599 lbs. \$234.86, 650-699 lbs. \$209.04; heifers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs. \$205.12, 350-399 lbs. \$207.50, 400-449 lbs. \$207.40, 450-499 lbs. \$207.97, 500-549 lbs. \$203.31, 550-599 lbs. \$184.37, 600-649 lbs. \$176.31.

Kentucky 1800 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1-2 400-449 lbs. \$271.36, 500-549 lbs. \$262.65, 550-599 lbs. \$244.29, 600-649 lbs. \$229.06, 650-699 lbs. \$223.88, 700-749 lbs. \$216.48, 800-849 lbs. \$203.57; heifers: medium and large No. 1-2 400-449 lbs. \$218.05, 450-499 lbs. \$223.21, 500-549 lbs. \$216.89, 550-599 lbs. \$212.56, 600-649 lbs. \$199.68, 650-699 lbs. \$206.07, 700-749 lbs. \$194.84.

Mississippi 1000 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs. \$314.71; heifers: medium and large No. 1 250-299 lbs. \$267.73, 400-449 lbs. \$261.54.

Alabama 2500 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 350-399 lbs. \$293.48, 600-649 lbs. \$245.81, 800-849 lbs. \$205; heifers: medium and large No. 1 350-399 lbs. \$252.72, 400-449 lbs. \$246.84, 450-499 lbs. \$234.57, 500-549 lbs. \$229.36, 600-649 lbs. \$208.30.

Georgia 4900 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs. \$308.54, 350-399 lbs. \$301.16, 400-449 lbs. \$288.38, 450-499 lbs. \$266.71, 500-549 lbs. \$258.29, 550-599 lbs. \$249.28, 600-649 lbs. \$239.67; heifers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs. \$252.93, 350-399 lbs. \$251.42, 400-449 lbs. \$245.66, 450-499 lbs. \$236.36, 500-549 lbs. \$226.30, 550-599 lbs. \$220.80, 600-649 lbs. \$207.13.

Florida 4900 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 250-299 lbs. \$364.81, 300-349 lbs. \$347.14, 350-399 lbs. \$318.34, 400-449 lbs. \$300.75, 450-499 lbs. \$291.27, 500-549 lbs. \$273.44; heifers: medium and large No. 1 250-299 lbs. \$291.54, 300-349 lbs. \$276.05, 350-399 lbs. \$266.01, 400-449 lbs. \$257.27, 450-499 lbs. \$243.78, 500-549 lbs. \$235.85.

## USDA Economist Updates Wool Producers On LDP, Loan Program

By Colleen Schreiber

DENVER — Jake Vuillemin, economist in the Economic and Policy Analysis Division of USDA's Farm Production and Conservation Business Center, offered an update on the loan deficiency payment program for wool as well as the marketing assistance loan program at the recent American Sheep Industry Association annual convention. His remarks were made during the wool policy forum of the convention.

Vuillemin told participants that there are dozens of commodities that can access the marketing assistance loan program and the LDP program. Currently wool is essentially the only one that consistently has an LDP available. Cotton and rice hit from time to time but not with the same consistency as wool, he said. He attributed it to the wool market itself.

"The wool market has not been great the last few years, particularly for the coarser and ungraded wools," said Vuillemin. "For ungraded wools, the payment is consistently the full value of the loan and that's reflective of the fact that there are times when it's not even worth the cost of transporting it off the farm."

While the LDP program has been around for some time, it has not always worked work well.

"Prior to 2020 it was useless," Vuillemin opined.

Even during COVID, it provided no relief for woolgrowers. "It became very clear that something wasn't quite right," he told participants. "Independent of the fact that the loan rates hadn't been changed in a while, it was like the way that we were calculating the payment just wasn't working anymore."

He added that there used to be more data collected from USDA-AMS. When that data began to disappear, data from the Australian Wool Exchange was used. However, the problem remained in that there was not a lot of good price information for the ungraded and coarser wools.

That's when USDA and the wool team at ASI began to look closely into how the payment rate is calculated and the market prices used. Changes were made and those changes enabled the program to be more beneficial to woolgrowers.

Vuillemin explained that the Marketing Assistance Loan program is intended to provide interim financing so that producers can cashflow the business while avoiding having to sell into a seasonally depressed market. The amount of loan principle that can be borrowed is equal to the pounds of wool multiplied by the loan rate for the class of wool produced.

He explained that there is a loan rate for ungraded wool

**See USDA Economist Continued On Page 8**



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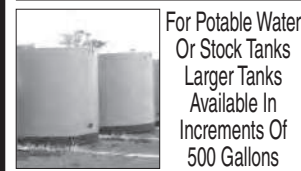
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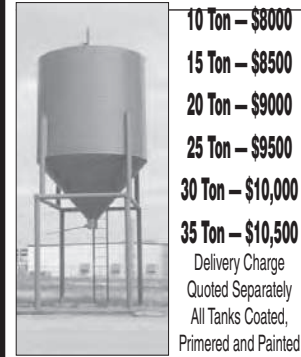
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USDA Economist  
Continued From Page 7

based on dollars per pound greasy and there are loan rates for graded wools that change based on the micron. For the latter, it is based on a clean basis.

He also pointed out that for wool the marketing year is for 13 months. Additionally, he noted that the loan rates ultimately have their roots in the Farm Bill.

“On the graded side it’s \$1.15 per pound greasy,” said Vuillemin. “We then apply the yield (1.15/0.46) to get \$2.50 on a clean basis.”

He reiterated that there is the ability to make quality differentiations within the loan rate to come up with the different prices for the different classes of wool.

“We’re always subject to the constraint that the weighted average price of those loan rates equal what is prescribed in statute, that \$2.50 per pound,” he stressed.

That statutory rate could change in the next Farm Bill.

Vuillemin told the group that

they’ve recalculated the credit loan rates for the 2024 marketing year. They are as follows on a dollars per pound clean basis: less than 18.6 micron \$4.43, 18.6-19.5 micron \$3.93, 19.6-20.5 micron \$3.64, 20.6-22 micron \$3.43, 22.1-23.5 micron \$3.18, 23.6-25.9 micron \$2.27, 26.0-28.9 \$1.04, greater than 29 micron \$0.76. Ungraded wool is \$0.40 per pound greasy.

Additionally, the decision was made that going forward these rates will be recalculated on an annual basis for graded wools.

“We need to make sure that the relative value of the different micron classes are reflective of what’s going on in the market,” Vuillemin explained. “Otherwise, the program is not as useful to producers, and it can potentially provide some perverse incentives.”

He added that the rates are recalculated for other commodities on an annual basis so this brings wool into the fold from that perspective. Going forward the new rates will be announced in December and take effect in January.

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If using the program for graded wool, a core test is required. The lab in San Angelo is now up and running and USDA has added it to their list of approved core testing facilities.

Producers may take out a marketing assistance loan at any time during the year using their wool as collateral.

The loan rate is the CCC cost of borrowing plus one percent.

“They’re usually able to borrow at the risk-free rate, so right now it’s about four percent and change,” he told the group.

After the loan is dispersed, producers have nine months max to pay the loan back or when the wool is sold, whichever comes first.

Each Tuesday morning USDA announces current market prices for graded and ungraded wools based on the Australian Wool Exchange. The prices are effective on Wednesday morning.

“If market prices drop below the loan rate, a producer only has to pay back the amount based on that lower market price, not the full amount borrowed,” said Vuillemin.

Producers also have the option of forfeiting the wool to the CCC.

“We don’t love that, but it is an option.”

Additionally, producers have the option of paying back the loan based on the weekly rate or the monthly rate whichever is cheaper.

Vuillemin also stressed that

once an LDP is requested for a particular lot of wool, the producer forgoes the right to get a marketing assistance loan and vice versa. He said the LDP has been much more popular.

He explained again that an LDP is a direct payment equal to the difference between the loan rate and the repayment rate multiplied by the pounds of wool shorn. He also noted that LDPs are available for

graded wool, ungraded wool and unshorn pelts. The unshorn pelt LDP is equal to the LDP for ungraded wool multiplied by 6.865.

Finally, he told participants that it may behoove them to simply use the program based on ungraded wool, particularly if only doing the LDP. Additionally, he said it’s worth visiting with one’s local FSA office to ensure everyone is on the same page.

Bilberry Named The NMCGA's  
2024 Cattleman Of The Year

By Julie Carter

At the close of the New Mexico Cattle Growers Association (NMCGA) Joint Stockmen’s Convention in December, Jeff Bilberry, VP of Singleton Ranches, was named 2024 Cattleman of the Year. The award is the most prestigious honor given by NMCGA and is bestowed annually to a well-rounded member of the ranching community who is an advocate for agriculture in any form.

“This award is not about me,” said Bilberry later in a phone interview. “It’s about God and a reflection of Him in my life. I was so floored when this happened. I had no idea. I came to the convention to go to the committee meetings and was ready to head home. They got me to stay by telling me Trent, my son, was getting an

award. So of course, we stayed and it never at any moment occurred to me that I was getting this award. I am so humbled by it. I don’t see myself being awarded for what I do. I just want to do my job and help where I can.”

Bilberry’s roots run generations deep in New Mexico ranching. His family migrated to the southeast area of the state from south Texas in the early 1880s and has been home ever since. Bilberry grew up on a ranch south of Kenna, graduated from Elida High School and attended Eastern New Mexico University on a rodeo scholarship as a calf roper. “I grew up in a part of the state where it is just an unwritten thing, you rope. I lived among the champions, so it was just part of the everyday. I didn’t grow up with any access to that, so the roping was up to me if I wanted to do it. I had to buy my own cattle, buy my own horses and build my own arena. Dillard and Jim Bob Nuckols were mentors, and both were a great influence on me.”

Cutting his college time short after three years, Bilberry returned to the home ranch to work full-time with his dad, Bud Bilberry. They ran large numbers of yearlings on wheat, had a couple preconditioning yards as well as a herd of his own cattle on pasture.

During that time, he met the girl of his dreams, Cheree Chase, on a blind date. “I agreed to the date so her friend would quit bugging me about it,” he said. “We went to dinner at K-Bobs with some friends and the rest is history.” The couple married in June 1984. Cheree was a “town girl” who, as she shared, had very limited cooking skills but could at least make spaghetti from a jar. It wasn’t too long though before she became, by endorsement from her husband and all the area cowboys, one of the best ranch wife cooks around. “I adjusted, adapted,” Cheree said. “I quickly grew to love the lifestyle, love living in the country. I still do.”

Bilberry continued to ranch, train horses and rodeo, but as his family grew with the addition of three children, Tori, Trent and Trey, he had to make the decision to focus on his home and family. “It wasn’t a hard choice,” he said. “It was just life. I needed to be home and not gone so much.” He hung up his rodeo plans to become a full-time husband, dad and rancher.

In 1992, Singletons bought the Bojax Ranch north of Roswell, New Mexico, and hired

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# Fewer U.S. Wool Manufacturers, Leaner, More Efficient, Capable

**By Colleen Schreiber**  
DENVER — A gloom and doom scenario is how many see the U.S. wool manufacturing business today. Mitch Driggers, government contract consultant for the American Sheep Industry (ASI) Association sees it otherwise. In his former life Driggers, a U.S. Air Force officer, was director of the U.S. Air Force Clothing Division where he was responsible for uniform

research, development and acquisition. With that background, Driggers was the perfect consultant to focus on the military side of the wool business for ASI. Normally when Driggers presents at the group's annual convention it is to offer a military uniform update. This time around he was specifically tasked with discussing the U.S. wool manufacturing supply chain as it is today compared to what it used to be. However, before getting into that topic, he couldn't resist sharing a picture of two different military uniforms. One was a uniform from the 1930s designed by General George Patton for his tank operators. It was 100 percent wool, dark green with pockets on the thighs so that his tankers could reach whatever they needed in their pockets, he told the group. The uniform was known as the Green Hornet. The other picture was of the new U.S. Space Force dress uniform, a wool/poly blend, now in production. Though it bears some resemblance to the Green Hornet, it's not the same, Driggers said. He told the group that the uniform is in such high demand that he was not able to get his hands on one to display.

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Turning then to the topic of U.S. wool manufacturing, he told participants that the numbers he was prepared to share would lead one to view the prospects as gloom and doom. To counter that, he first shared a picture of a new spinning facility located in North Carolina. "It's the first one we've seen in this country in a long time," he told the group. "It's not gloom and doom. The wool industry is a viable, active industry in the U.S."

That said he stressed that 2024 is not 1995. "Those days are not coming back," said Driggers. "We will not see the big mills we saw in the 1980s and 90s, but what we will see is an industry that is tailored to the demand of what is used in the U.S. today and what we export as well."

He added that the export piece is really the important piece of it all. He shared some numbers from 1995. Wool production then was at 63.4 million pounds greasy; exports were six million pounds greasy, and imports were 88.8 million pounds clean. Total mill consumption, the amount used in the U.S., was 142 million pounds clean, with Burlington alone producing 60 million linear yards of fabric of that total.

In 2022, U.S. wool production had dropped to 22.2 million pounds greasy, exports totaled 7.3 million pounds greasy, and imports totaled 6.2 million pounds of clean wool. In particular, Driggers highlighted the export and import numbers, noting that in 2022 more pounds of wool were exported, over a million pounds more, compared to 1995 even though substantially less was produced in 2022, some 41 million pounds less as compared to 1995.

There was a huge difference in imports as well, over 88 million pounds of clean wool imported in 1995 compared to just over six million pounds in 2022.

Also in 2022, mill consumption was an estimated 10 million pounds clean, and

Burlington's production alone dropped to five million linear yards. Driggers explained that mill consumption in 2022 was an estimate because the USDA no longer tracks that figure. The last time it was tracked was in 2003. At that time, wool consumption was 49.9 million pounds and Burlington produced about five million linear yards.

Another chart showed a "relative" look at what the U.S. market uses. The military piece, which essentially stays steady, is at about 15 to 20 percent of the total, Driggers said. Also today, about 65 percent of the total U.S. wool clip is exported. Domestic commercial mills use about 14 percent of the total while small mills consume about six percent.

He also shared a diagram indicating the complexity of the wool manufacturing supply chain.

"Wool processing is very complicated, very expensive and it takes a long time," he reminded.

He used Chargeurs, as an example.

"When wool comes into the back end of Chargeurs, it's blended five times before it ever gets into the scouring line," said Driggers.

In fact, a mathematical evaluation of the blending process found that a single fiber is blended a million times before it ever comes out as top, he told participants. Then, when that top gets to the spinning mill, it goes through numerous processes before it ever hits the spinning line.

He put together a list of commercial producing manufacturers, a list that he stressed was by no means a comprehensive list. In 1995, among them were names like Faribault, Woolrich, Pendleton, American Woolen, Jagger Brothers, Northwest Woolen and Draper Knitting as well as Burlington, Bollman, Chargeurs, and Kentwool to name but a few.

"A lot have changed names; they might still be there, but a bigger number have left the room for a variety of reasons," said Driggers.

While the number of manufacturers today is far fewer, today's list encompasses some of the old but also a fair number of new manufacturers as well, the likes of Meridian Specialty Yarn Group, a state-of-the-art dyeing facility built less than 20 years ago in South Caro-

lina, a facility Driggers called "awesome." Tintoria Piana is another dye facility in Georgia. Others included Mountain Meadow, which Driggers said is his favorite startup story, as well as Clover Knits and Carolina Cotton Works.

"This list of manufacturers is a perfectly capable list of converting the wool that you all grow," said Driggers.

"While the list of reasons for the decline in the number of manufacturers is extensive, most immediately blame the loss on labor and global competition," said Driggers.

"There's some truth in that, but those are not the only reasons," he stressed.

In particular, he pointed to the trade agreements established in the 1980s and 90s.

"Those had a huge impact on wool manufacturing and textile manufacturing leaving us."

However, he also reminded participants the latter is not unusual.

"The textile industry came to us from Europe because we had cheaper labor; we had power and we had raw materials."

The industry came into New England and thrived there until about 1940. At that point, the mill owners discovered that they could move to the Southeast and save money on labor, power and facilities. Thus, the textile industry moved to the Southeast.

At the same time, a very robust garment-making industry developed in the U.S. That existed until about the mid-1980s. Then with the trade agreements and global competition aspect, manufacturers began to leave again, this time from the U.S. to other shores.

"Historically, the textile industry has been the industry that has industrialized more countries than any other industry," said Driggers.

Also, on his list of reasons why so many wool manufacturers have gone by the wayside was, synthetic fibers.

"I can't overemphasize the impact of synthetic fiber," he told the group.

He noted that in 1995, total world fiber production was about 24 million metric tons. In 2020, it had grown to about 124 million metric tons but 86 percent of that was synthetics of which about 55 percent was polyester.

"When we look at the



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**Feeder Cattle**  
**Continued From Page 9**  
lbs. \$261.01, 450-499 lbs. \$257.08, 500-549 lbs. \$240.67, 550-599 lbs. \$229.84, 600-649 lbs. \$217.82, 650-699 lbs. \$212.84, 700-749 lbs. \$204.51, 750-799 lbs. \$197.82, 800-849 lbs. \$191.68, 850-899 lbs. \$185.43, 950-999 lbs. \$166.62.  
Tennessee 5300 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1-2 300-349 lbs. \$322.75, 350-399 lbs. \$312.85, 400-449 lbs. \$299.88, 450-499 lbs. \$298.76, 500-549 lbs. \$284.62, 550-599 lbs. \$269.89, 600-649 lbs. \$246.91, 650-699 lbs. \$235.40, 700-749 lbs. \$228.92; heifers: medium and large No. 1-2 300-349 lbs. \$278.76, 350-399 lbs. \$271.23, 400-449 lbs. \$260.13, 450-499 lbs. \$251.98, 500-549 lbs. \$237.80, 550-599 lbs. \$223.80, 600-649 lbs. \$209.60, 650-699 lbs. \$211.22.  
Arkansas 7800 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs. \$346.63, 350-399 lbs. \$349.64, 400-449 lbs. \$326.35, 450-499 lbs. \$314.30, 500-549 lbs. \$303.26, 550-599 lbs. \$284.35, 600-649 lbs. \$275,

650-699 lbs. \$256.28, 700-749 lbs. \$253.64, 750-799 lbs. \$239, 800-849 lbs. \$226.22, 850-899 lbs. \$228.06; heifers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs. \$292.71, 350-399 lbs. \$293.53, 400-449 lbs. \$279.70, 450-499 lbs. \$275.26, 500-549 lbs. \$264.23, 550-599 lbs. \$246.70, 600-649 lbs. \$236.78, 650-699 lbs. \$229.05, 700-749 lbs. \$221.41.  
Mississippi 5400 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 200-249 lbs. \$392.41, 250-299 lbs. \$387.17, 300-349 lbs. \$378.47, 350-399 lbs. \$370.30, 400-449 lbs. \$339.36, 450-499 lbs. \$315.66,

500-549 lbs. \$303.37, 550-599 lbs. \$281.16; heifers: medium and large No. 1 250-299 lbs. \$315.80, 300-349 lbs. \$307.56, 350-399 lbs. \$290.25, 400-449 lbs. \$275.30, 450-499 lbs. \$262.24, 500-549 lbs. \$249.82, 550-599 lbs. \$233.99, 600-649 lbs. \$230.12, 650-699 lbs. \$217.04.

Alabama 5700 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs. \$356.55, 400-449 lbs. \$333.71, 450-499 lbs. \$314.10, 500-549 lbs. \$305.49, 550-599 lbs. \$281.84, 600-649 lbs. \$269.65, 700-749 lbs. \$239.54; heifers: medium and large No. 1 250-299 lbs. \$309.20, 300-349 lbs. \$296.91, 350-399 lbs. \$291.75, 400-449 lbs. \$276.63, 450-499 lbs. \$264.75, 500-549 lbs. \$252.10, 550-599 lbs. \$241.02, 600-649 lbs. \$230.40, 650-699 lbs. \$224.28.

Georgia 5800 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs. \$375.61, 350-399 lbs. \$354.88, 400-449 lbs. \$336.55, 450-499 lbs. \$321.28, 500-549 lbs. \$294.75, 550-599 lbs. \$283.15, 600-649 lbs. \$259.09, 700-749 lbs. \$236.63; heifers: medium and large No. 1 300-349 lbs. \$290.75, 350-399 lbs. \$282.81, 400-449 lbs. \$270.30, 450-499 lbs. \$258.96, 500-549 lbs. \$249.77, 550-599 lbs. \$238.97, 600-649 lbs. \$228.59, 650-699 lbs. \$222.18, 700-749 lbs. \$215.93, 800-849 lbs. \$210.

Florida 5500 head. Steers: medium and large No. 1 200-249 lbs. \$448.39, 250-299 lbs. \$437.60, 300-349 lbs. \$410.84, 350-399 lbs. \$380.61, 400-449 lbs. \$345.65, 450-499 lbs. \$314.93, 500-549 lbs. \$298.83; heifers: medium and large No. 1 250-299 lbs. \$348.07, 300-349 lbs. \$328.38, 350-399 lbs. \$301.18, 400-449 lbs. \$283.08, 450-499 lbs. \$266.14, 500-549 lbs. \$255.83.

## Sheep Producers Await Inventory Report; Dictates Market Outlook

**By Colleen Schreiber**  
DENVER — The lamb market is no stranger to volatility and this past year was really no different. The new year is expected to provide slightly improved feeder lamb price, perhaps fewer imports and trend line demand for lamb.

That was largely the gist of a lamb market update and outlook offered by Tyler Cozzens, agricultural economist with the Livestock Marketing Information Center (LMIC), at the recent American Sheep Industry Association's annual convention here.

Cozzens, who presented his update to the lamb council, told participants that LMIC is a nonprofit housed within the Colorado State University's Extension services. Working with 28 land grant universities, their primary role is to gather data information, conduct market analysis and research. That information is then shared with Extension who then relays that information to producers out in the country. They also work with numerous industry groups, including ASI.

Cozzens reminded that the USDA-NASS sheep and lamb inventory report is due out January 31. He shared a chart of year ago inventory levels and pointed specifically to the fact that sheep and lamb inventory has been on a general downward decline.

"We've been saying that for several years now," said Cozzens.

In particular he is focused

on the breeding number in that pending report as that paints a picture in terms of available market supplies for lambs through 2024. The number he's working with is about five million total sheep and lamb inventory for his market forecast. He broke production into the three main areas, California, Texas and the Intermountain and Northern Plains region.

Cozzens also closely follows the drouth monitor maps in terms of the impact of drouth to overall crop condition, range and pasture conditions and feed availability.

"We definitely see some improved conditions from what we were seeing a few years ago," he told the group.

He noted in particular a downward trend in alfalfa hay prices compared to a year ago though it remains a little elevated from the five-year average.

In terms of feed costs, he also tracks Omaha corn prices. Last year's price finished just below \$5 per bushel. Cozzens is also expecting corn to be below the \$5 mark for most of 2024.

"As far as the feed cost, we're expecting it to be a little bit lower than it's been over the past years, but again still above the five-year average," he said.

Looking at weekly lamb slaughter levels, Cozzens noted that at various times throughout 2023, the level was below the five-year average. However, towards the end of 2023 weekly slaughter levels improved and that improvement pushed weekly slaughter levels to almost three percent above the weekly average for 2022.

He also noted that mature sheep slaughter was slightly higher, particularly in the summer months of the third quarter.

"I wouldn't say there's anything overly concerning there," Cozzens told participants. "There are definitely some spikes, but not anything where we saw a trend that was above what we would expect."

The mature sheep slaughter

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number is critical as it impacts the 2024 breeding flock inventory. That in turn could impact the overall market outlook for the year.

Something that surprised him was that the weekly dressed weight average tracked quite a bit lower than the five-year average throughout most of 2023. That translated into an overall lower lamb meat availability number for the year.

“We had higher total sheep and lamb slaughter, but those lower dressed weights more than offset the higher number of lambs slaughtered leading to that lower lamb production number,” said Cozzens.

He also noted that a lower supply number should add some price support which he said was likely what was happening towards the latter part of 2023.

He also shared some feeder lamb numbers. These numbers are a composite of the Colorado, South Dakota and Texas markets, a simple average across those three market prices on a weekly basis. He had his 2023 feeder lamb price forecast at \$2.20-2.30 for the year. However, in Thanksgiving there was about two weeks where there was no data available. After that the price spiked up and ended above \$3 per pound.

“I definitely do not give myself a passing grade on that,” said Cozzens. “I was not expecting that ... but from a producer standpoint, that’s definitely positive news.”

He reiterated again though that some of that spike up was likely attributable to the overall lower supply. Additionally, he pointed out that Easter comes a bit earlier this year, March 31, so some of that upward movement could possibly also be due to early pull through for the Easter market supply chain.

“The first full week of January prices have definitely continued that upward trend,” said Cozzens. “That’s a good sign.”

He added that the year could end on a bit more positive note.

He also shared an update on a project he’s working on with ASI and the University of Wyoming determining overall health of the sheep industry, namely profitability within the industry. The model phase of the project closely follows what LMIC does on the cattle side, said Cozzens.

As part of the exercise, the group is tracking monthly estimated returns for lamb feeding operations in Colorado. He

explained that they’re specifically looking at returns above variable costs. Fixed costs were not included in the analysis because as he pointed out those vary by operation. Even variable costs vary, so some assumptions had to be made, he said. For example feed costs were strictly based on hay and corn costs, and specifically for Colorado. He told participants that Colorado’s corn basis is basically positive year-round which leads to a higher corn price going into these Colorado lambs.

The piece that the model is most sensitive to is the actual feeder lamb price. The model is based on a 70 pound feeder lamb finished at 140 pounds. Some labor, inflation and interest rates are included in the calculation for overall cost.

Feeder lamb returns were up earlier in 2023 but then as feeder prices started to increase, that offset some of that profitability and there was a bit more of a downward trend over the last couple of months of 2023.

Looking at the cutout price based on a rolling five-day average daily price, it too was on a positive trend throughout 2023, near that \$4.50 per pound range.

“I would argue from a demand perspective that means that demand is still there,” said Cozzens.

Cozzens also tracks cold storage supplies. He noted that cold storage supplies trended lower the last few months of 2023.

“I would argue a lot of that is

just supply getting pulled out for the holiday season,” he told the group. “If we start to see this move higher, that means product is potentially getting backed up in the supply chain, and that could potentially then start to translate to a lower cutout value.”

As far as trade, specifically imports, he noted that there is typically a six week lag in the data. However, the November data wasn’t terribly out of line from November 2022. Cozzens said he’s not expecting imports for 2024 and 2025 to be all that high.

Finally, he suggested that demand for lamb increased for about two years during COVID and the year or so after. He suggested that for 2024 and 2025 lamb demand will follow a more historic trend.

Wrapping up, he reiterated a few key things to consider for planning purposes. Specifically, he stressed the need to look at inventory levels when the report is released, namely the breeding flock number. Cozzens said he’s not expecting anything terribly surprising or out of the ordinary.

The drouth monitor becomes increasingly important into the spring in terms of feed availability and pasture conditions.

Imports, he suggested should not be hugely higher over the next year or two.

“That is definitely price supportive for the industry,” he said.

Inflation is a bit of a wildcard, Cozzens told the group.

“I don’t really know how that’s going to play out in 2024. There is a lot of discussion around the Feds lowering

interest rates. We’ll see how much they actually lower them and what kind of response that has on the economy and the consumer’s willingness to go out and purchase more goods.”

Overall lamb production, he reiterated is expected to be down over the next two years with dressed weights

being another wildcard.

“We’ll be watching that closely and adjusting our forecast accordingly.”

Finally, given lower production and lower anticipated supplies, Cozzens said he has feeder lamb prices slightly higher over the next couple of years.



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Producers Dialog About Value-Added Businesses At ASI Meet

**By Colleen Schreiber**  
DENVER — Entrepreneurship was on full display at the recent American Sheep Industry Association’s annual convention. Throughout the several-day event, participants had the opportunity to hear about the successes and some of the struggles and challenges in startups from a wide variety of individual entrepreneurs

from several different parts of the country.

Albert Wilde, CEO, Wild Valley Farms, is a sixth-generation sheep rancher from Utah. He runs 2000-plus sheep, and in 2015 he developed a pellet form of inorganic fertilizer using his waste wool.

Wilde told the group that wool is the only soil amendment that can solve three big problems for plant growers,

particularly in a greenhouse setting. It’s high in nitrogen and can feed the plant throughout the growing season, it helps hold water in the soil thereby reducing the need to water a plant by 25 percent and it improves porosity essentially by softening the soil.

In the first water-holding study done on Wilde’s product, the greenhouse grower added water to the plants with the traditional soil amendments and then he took another set of plants and added wool pellets and water. At the end of seven days, the plants in the soil with the wool pellets had 40 percent more water left compared to those planted in the traditional soil amendments.

The greenhouse grower also did a growth trial with some tomato plants that were being sold to Costco. He was using bloodmeal as the organic nitrogen source, which is 12 percent nitrogen, said Wilde. It took the grower 76 days to get the tomato plants market ready using the bloodmeal. When the wool pellets were used, it took 38 days, Wilde told the group.

That study was followed by a release curve study done by Utah State University. Basically, it showed again that wool has a high nutrient content.

They’ve also done studies with the University of Vermont on row crops. They were interested in learning if wool would be an effective fertilizer and if it would help reduce nutrient runoff. The study showed higher crop yields when using wool compared to any of the other fertilizers in the study. Additionally, researchers found a three-day earlier harvest rate for crops when using wool pellets, said Wilde. He also told the group that their

biggest roadblock to having wool pellets known as the best organic fertilizer is simply education.

“People ask all the time what I add as the fertilizer, and I have to explain that the wool is the fertilizer,” said Wilde. “Others think it’s the manure, but a pellet with a lot of manure has less nutritional value compared to a pellet that is 100 percent wool.”

Lack of education is why when he began manufacturing his wool pellets he chose to start small with an eight-ounce package. He also went this route to keep his price point high.

“Eventually, I would like to see the bottom of the waste wool market at \$1 per pound,” said Wilde. “To do that, I need to keep the price up, but I also want to make sure that the product is a value for the consumer.”

On the latter, he explained that an eight-ounce package of wool pellets that costs \$12 will feed six, one-gallon hanging baskets.

“I felt the consumer would see that as a good value.”

Despite the unfamiliarity of wool as a fertilizer, the market is growing, said Wilde. As hard as it was on society, COVID was a particularly good time for his business because a lot of people began gardening during their confinement and work from home stint.

Though he can’t afford to buy all the low-grade wool produced in the country, he has made deals with producers to have them ship him his wool and he’ll pelletize it for them for \$3 per pound and ship the pellets back to them to sell.

Wilde has one customer in California who initially shipped him 600 pounds of wool. He pelletized it and shipped it back to her in 22-pound bags at a cost of \$3000, shipping included. She then sold those 22-pound

bags of wool pellets at her local farmer’s market for \$165 per bag. Five months later she sent him another 1200 pounds of wool. She averaged about \$2.50 per pound profit on her waste wool by pelletizing it and selling it as fertilizer, Wilde said.

Wilde added that some want to use their own packaging with their own label, but Wilde said every state is different in terms of licensing and labeling registration, and it’s not an easy process. He’s already passed that step so that’s a benefit to those who just want it pelletized and sold in his packaging. He knows of a couple of producers in California who have tried to get theirs licensed and have yet to succeed.

He also has other customers who are simply using the pelleted fertilizer in their own farming operation.

Wilde has educated and promoted the product by sending hundreds of samples to FFA groups, and he also became acquainted with a social media person who has two million followers on Instagram. Because her followers already trusted what she was doing in the gardening space, when she used the product and was able to relay the benefits of it to her followers, it grew product interest not only with her followers but with other influencers.

Responding to a question about the pelleting process itself and the cost, he told the group that the cost to make them is simply the cost of the electricity.

Marie Hoff, Full Circle Wool, a shepherd and wool monger in northern California, raises a small flock of heritage breed sheep primarily for contract grazing. She began Full Circle Wool in 2013.

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she was looking to use wool to develop practical everyday household use items. The one product that has caught on best are her wool dish sponges which she developed in 2014. “If there’s something I need, I’m going to try and construct it out of wool,” Hoff told the group. “The dish sponge came about one day while I was doing dishes with one of the crummy standard sponges. It was just gross, smelled terrible and looked awful with little pieces flaking away. It was moldy and I asked how was it that this could be cleaning my dishes.”

Through trial and error, she eventually developed her own wool sponge. She began marketing them small scale through her local farmer’s market. They were popular and caught on and the margins worked for her.

“I was able to sell wool dish sponges at a price that people were able to pay and felt was reasonable to pay,” said Hoff. “Plus, it’s a good quality product and so much better than the standard dish sponges we’re used to.”

Her customers report they like the fact that it doesn’t smell, a sponge lasts six months to a year, and as Hoff pointed out it fills a niche in that it is not only a good quality product, but is environmentally friendly, something that is also important to many of her customers.

She told the group that as demand grew the challenge became processing.

“Manufacturing in the U.S. is very limited, but I’ve been slowly finding different production partners to help us scale up.”

In fact, in 2023 she finally found a partner to work with on a commercial scale and a distributor to carry the product in some retail stores in northern California. She’s hopeful that presence will help the business grow enabling her to reach a much more mainstream audience.

She’s also hopeful that her story will continue to resonate with more and more people particularly the part of the story about how through the production of wool she’s helping to manage native landscapes.

Finally, Hoff told participants that her big picture goal is to have a product that enables woolgrowers to garner some profit from their coarser wools. She pointed out that those like herself who operate on the northern California coast who can get their wool sold are either losing money, just covering the costs of shearing or barely breaking even.

“That’s not sustainable,” said Hoff. “With the wool sponge project, I’m looking at something that actually gives the woolgrower a price for their wool that contains some profit as well as some for my production partners and myself.”

During Saturday’s board of director’s meeting, attendees also heard from Ralph DiMeo, with WeatherWool. As a life-long hunter, he shared how he had never been satisfied with the wool clothing he hunted in. It wasn’t ever all that comfortable. He worked in woolens in the office that were comfortable, and he wondered why he couldn’t have comfortable wool clothing to hunt in. After an extensive search, he concluded that kind of hunting apparel simply didn’t exist, so he decided to make his own.

As a way of an introduction, DiMeo noted that when he was a kid everyone wore wool. Back then, Americans also wore American made clothing. That’s not so much the case today. Now, most Americans wear synthetics made elsewhere.

“We’re out to change that,” said DiMeo. “We wouldn’t be doing this if we weren’t huge believers in what woolen clothing can do.”

He sees great opportunity to grow the business by simply educating consumers about the value of wool.

“One of the things we’ve tried to get across to people is wool clothing is made by nature,” DiMeo told participants. “We think that’s key as there are more and more lovers of nature among the American public.”

He added that wool as rain gear is something that most people wouldn’t think about either. His products are now proving that out.

John Helle is a third-generation sheep rancher operating a fourth-generation ranch in southwest Montana with his wife, Karen, two sons, Evan and Weston, his mother and brother Tom. The family raises Rambouillet sheep. They also started Duckworth, a vertically integrated wool company through which they turn their high-quality wool into quality wool garments.

Helle told the group that it all starts with the genetics. His family has been selecting sheep for 40-50 years to get the kind of genetics needed to get the micron down and the length and strength up without adversely affecting the ability of their sheep to be

highly productive on the range. Starting out they did it through diligence and persistence the old-fashioned way with him and his wife weighing lambs on a scale.

However, over the last 20-some years they’ve been involved in the National Sheep Improvement Program thanks to help from Montana State University and the Montana Wool Lab.

Helle acknowledges that today there is so much more technology available to them, and thanks to his two sons, who are a bit more tech savvy and possibly more patient, it’s getting employed.

In the early 2000s he traveled to Australia and returned with several OFTA 2000s. Since then, hundreds of thousands of their fleeces have been tested with this machine.

While visiting a top maker in Australia, he learned something that stuck with him, that making wool top is like making a cake. All the ingredients in certain proportions are needed to make good top. That’s why their focus is on making sure they have a lot of different lines of wools that can be put together.

To that end, their wool is sorted into lots that match the different types of yarn needed to make the right type of top to make the right type of fabrics, Helle explained. Typically, they’ll have 11 to 12 different lines of wool.

Because Duckworth’s primary focusing is next to skin products, Helle Rambouillet sorts their wool accordingly. For example, their finest line, their AAA line, goes into their single jersey knit while the slightly coarser wools go into wool socks and outerwear. Essentially every line of wool is targeted for a specific wool product.

He also told the group that it takes year-round diligence to ensure they maintain a high-quality wool clip for garment production. As important as shearing is - how it’s done makes a huge difference - it’s just one time in the year. Year-round their vigilant about making sure their sheep do not go into corrals that may have animal hair or polypropylene twine.

“We’re super serious about

keeping our wool free of contamination,” said Helle. “We’ve seen how contamination problems down the chain have a devastating economic effect on the product.”

Industry partners come to the ranch during shearing to learn the process, and to see all the steps they take to harvest a quality wool clip. They’ve also posted numerous YouTube videos on the Duckworth website to demonstrate and educate consumers about the process.

However, it’s not just about the wool. The family is focused on producing the best dual-purpose sheep possible. They sell some 2000 breeding ewes annually to build a clientele that can also help fill their need for wool in the future.

“We’re constantly looking for that ideal female in terms of average rolling pounds of lamb weaned per ewe,” he told the group. “It’s an ongoing process but having lots of data at our fingertips helps guide us through the decision-making process. We can make progress on the lamb side without losing on wool characteristics.”

Helle told the group that having a vertically integrated wool company gives them some stability in that they’re now consistently getting a good price for their wool. However, he acknowledged that startups are risky, and they also require a lot of capital. They brought in some partners to help with that. They also secured a loan through the Sheep Center.

“We were not bankable,” said Helle. “We’re thankful that the Sheep and Goat Fund took a risk on us.”

They decided to go the private interest route because while the ranch had the ability to leverage assets to finance the project, the family was not willing to do that.

The way it works is the



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ranch is a separate entity. They also formed a separate entity in between the ranch and Duckworth to handle the purchasing of wool and processing of it through the stages of production, and then Duckworth is another separate entity. “It takes different business entities and thoughtful processes to keep bankers happy and tax accountants happy and other ranch partners and owners happy and also so we’re not putting ranch assets at risk,” said Helle. David Fisher hails from West Central Texas where he runs a commercial Rambouillet sheep operation on land that’s been in the family for four generations. Though he

**See Wool Innovation Continued On Page 14**



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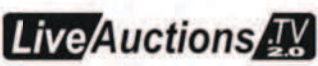
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Wool Innovation
Continued From Page 13

markets most of the products produced on his outfit to the highest bidder, he also does some value-added marketing with his wife Stacy who happens to be a fashion designer. In terms of producing a quality product, be it wool or lamb, Fisher told the group that for him it boils down to three things, and he too said it all starts with genetics. He added that in his selection process he doesn't get focused on one single factor. He participates in the Na-

tional Sheep Improvement Program (NSIP) though it's perhaps not at the highest level in terms of the amount of testing, but rather he has a program of testing that works best for him. Rather than test every fleece, he's primarily testing at the yearling stage. Micron and fleece weight are collected. He then establishes a range that he wants his sheep to fit within. "That allows me to cut out the bottom," Fisher explained. The second step for him is management which is also another year-round process.

He pointed out that it does him little good to have the right genetics if they're not also managed appropriately. The third element is preparation. "We can work all year-long on management and having the right genetics and screw it all up in a day," he told the group. In this case, he was specifically referring to his wool clip. More to the point, he takes the time to make sure it's prepared properly. That means, in part, having clean pens, a clean shearing surface and prep surface and the clip is skirted and basically prepared in a way that makes it appealing to buyers. Fisher also switched shearing crews a couple of years ago because he wasn't satisfied with the quality of the shearing process or with how the animals were being handled during shearing. He told the group that when he first got involved with NSIP his initial focus was on the lamb production side of the equation because his lambs account for the largest percentage of income that he gets from his sheep. "Ram production is first for me," said Fisher. "My goal was to have better lamb production and not go backwards in wool production." Over the last few years, he's seen that pay out in that his

wool clip is now also a little better in terms of the micron and yield. Because he was tired of essentially being a price taker on his wool, he and his wife, Stacy, decided to try their hand in a value-added venture with their wool. He likes to say he grows it and delivers it and then steps aside and allows Stacy to do what she does best. They started small and are now utilizing about 1500 pounds out of their clip in this value-added venture. He told the group that it's not for everyone, and there is a learning curve. He shears about 10,000 pounds of wool annually. "We'll never get to the point where I'm using all of it in a value-added product mainly because it ties up a lot of money for a long time, and I'm not willing to do that," Fisher told the group. "However, it is nice to have a product to feel good about, and we can set our price to capture as many dollars as we can." He told the group that he's struggled a bit getting Stacy to understand that he really needs to know two years out what she needs and wants. "We've had to change the way we plan shearing and a few other things, but as far as


management we still manage for the highest quality wool," said Fisher. "We've always cared about doing a good job, nothing's changed there. It's just trying to do a little better planning and looking into the future a little more." Minnesota sheep producer, Bob Padula tells people he lives and operates closer to South Dakota than he does Minnesota. Though he's a small producer with less than 100 ewes, he's been enrolled in NSIP since 1990. His clip is length and strength tested, and he's adamant about maintaining a skirted, paint-free wool clip. His wool clip is marketed through Roswell Wool and then to the startup, WeatherWool. Padula has an off-the-farm job, so he must have easy keeping sheep and particularly so given that he operates in a really harsh environment in Minnesota. "Where I live, we have 10 months of winter and two months of bad ice-skating," he quipped. Despite the weather extremes, he is about as close as one can get to a range operation in the Midwest. He feeds hay in the wintertime, but otherwise tries to maintain a low input system. Ewes lamb in April and May and he shears in March when weather allows. He learned a hard lesson about buying rams that were not fiber tested and since 1988 he won't even look at a ram that hasn't been fiber length and fiber diameter tested. Asked how he manages to produce a good wool clip without sacrificing his lamb product, Padula told the group that it's pretty simple. "If you start off with good wool and don't go backwards, it pretty well takes care of itself." On the lamb side, NSIP has been a bit slow in moving

towards carcass data collection and evaluation. Padula was advocating for that back in the 1990s. However given the size of his operation, he said he's not likely to ever use NSIP for carcass data. Instead, he focuses on taking out the bottom 25 percent of his herd, and in that way his whole herd gradually shifts upwards in quality. "Lamb weight is important, don't get me wrong, and we need number of lambs, but I'm going to focus on pounds of lamb and making well rounded ewe replacements with good wool," he concluded.

Lampasas Slaughter
Bulls \$2-4 Higher

LAMPASAS — (Feb. 14) — This week, feeder steers and heifers steady, slaughter cows and bulls \$2-4 higher. Receipts totaled 367 head. Steers: 200-300 pounds \$261-350, 300-400 pounds \$261-335, 400-500 pounds \$271-340, 500-600 pounds \$231-315, 600-700 pounds \$225-264, 700-800 pounds no test. Heifers: 200-300 pounds \$236-276, 300-400 pounds \$228-300, 400-500 pounds \$239-290, 500-600 pounds \$220-270, 600-700 pounds \$165-229, 700-800 pounds \$198-234. Slaughter cows: under 800 pounds no test, 800-1100 pounds \$80-108, 1100-1300 pounds \$80-114; bulls 1000-1300 pounds no test, 1300-2100 pounds \$65-130, replacements no test. Replacement cows: baby-tooth to five year old \$1400-1800; solidmouth \$1250-1700. Cow/calf pairs: young to middle aged with 300 pound calf up to split; aged with 300 pound calf split. Every year, if not every day, we have to wager our salvation upon some prophecy based upon imperfect knowledge. — Oliver Wendell Holmes.


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400-500 Pounds	\$260.00-\$362.50 CWT	\$200.00-\$325.00 CWT
500-600 Pounds	\$220.00-\$325.00 CWT	\$190.00-\$265.00 CWT
600-700 Pounds	\$200.00-\$285.00 CWT	\$180.00-\$254.00 CWT
700-800 Pounds	\$180.00-\$259.00 CWT	\$170.00-\$216.00 CWT
Lower Quality Steers	\$100.00-\$150.00 CWT	
Lower Quality Heifers		\$ 80.00-\$150.00 CWT

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1 Black Steer	500 Pounds @ \$325.00 CWT
3 Black Steers	608 Pounds @ \$285.00 CWT
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13 Black Heifers	706 Pounds @ \$216.00 CWT
1 Black Heifer	650 Pounds @ \$254.00 CWT


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Light Lambs	Steady
Heavy Lambs	Steady
Kids	Steady
#1 Wool Lambs, 40-60 Pounds	\$180.00-\$290.00 CWT
#1 Wool Lambs, 60-80 Pounds	\$170.00-\$290.00 CWT
Barbado Lambs, 40-60 Pounds	\$130.00-\$280.00 CWT
Dorper Cross Lambs, 40-60 Pounds	\$200.00-\$316.00 CWT
Dorper Cross Lambs, 60-80 Pounds	\$200.00-\$316.00 CWT
Light Slaughter Lambs, 45-80 Pounds	\$140.00-\$316.00 CWT
Slaughter Lambs, 90-140 Pounds	\$140.00-\$290.00 CWT
Packer Ewes	\$ 20.00-\$130.00 CWT
Sheep Bucks / Rams	\$ 90.00-\$190.00 CWT
#1 Spanish / Boer Cross Kids, 20-40 Pounds	\$100.00-\$390.00 CWT
#1 Spanish / Boer Cross Kids, 40-60 Pounds	\$140.00-\$390.00 CWT
#1 Spanish / Boer Cross Kids, 60-80 Pounds	\$160.00-\$355.00 CWT
Spanish / Boer Muttons	\$175.00-\$355.00 CWT
Angora Kids	\$140.00-\$280.00 CWT
Lower Quality Kids	\$100.00-\$200.00 CWT
Packer Spanish / Boer Cross Nannies	\$ 30.00-\$200.00 CWT
Stocker Spanish / Boer Cross Nannies	\$200.00-\$300.00 CWT
Angora Nannies	\$ 20.00-\$200.00 CWT
Boer Cross Billies	\$160.00-\$220.00 CWT

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