

# The American Lamb Supply Chain: Challenges, Opportunities, & Innovation

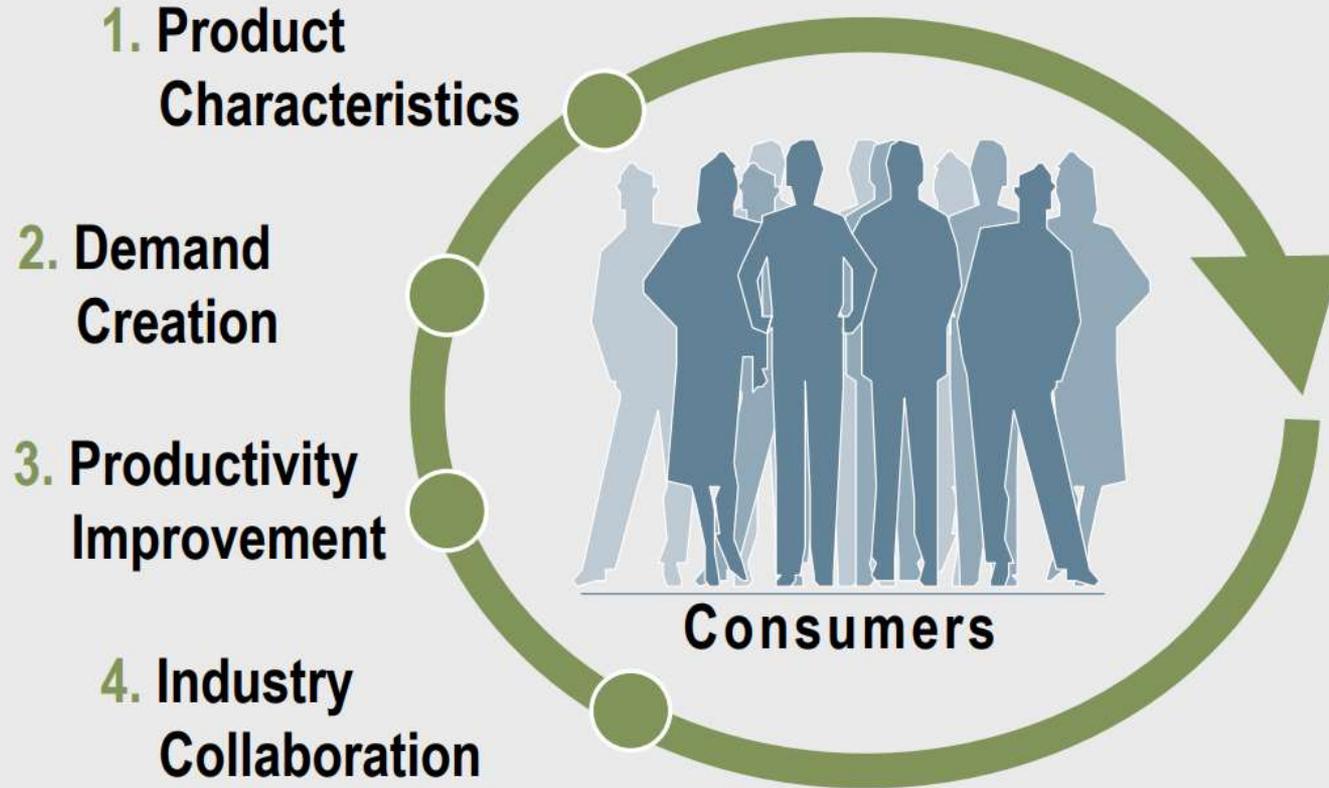
## 2026 American Sheep Industry Association Lamb Council

David Fisher, Karissa Isaacs, Dan Lippert & Nick Forrest

Moderated by: Dr. Travis W. Hoffman

January 30, 2026

# How Do We Get There? ➔ Four Industry Goals



# Hitting our American Lamb Target

## 5 and 10 Years from Now without Aggressive Change

### 5 Years From Now

- Imports are 80% of U.S. consumption
- Many commercial producers exit the U.S. lamb industry
- The traditional marketing channel is on verge of collapse

### 10 Years From Now

- The traditional marketing channel has collapsed
- The non-traditional marketing channel is very profitable and has grown dramatically
- Consumption of American lamb is starting to grow from very low base

## So what do almost all consumers want?

- Less fat
- Superb taste
- Tenderness
- Great nutrition
- Absolute consistency

# Big Hairy Audacious Goals

1. Double the per capita consumption of lamb by 2020
2. Increase American lamb share to 65% by 2020
3. Export 20% of our production

# Lamb Industry Roadmap Action Steps

- 1) A long-term strategic plan to achieve those goals.
- 2) Greater use of value-based pricing for lambs.
- 3) Use of electronic grading of lambs.
- 4) Use the results of the lamb quality audit.
- 5) A recommended definition of “lamb” that reduces unfavorable eating experiences.

# Lamb Industry Roadmap Action Steps

- 6) Greater support for direct marketers of lamb.
- 7) Coordinated promotional messages about U.S. lamb.
- 8) More producer productivity groups.
- 9) A Sheep Research and Education plan.
- 10) A revitalized National Sheep Improvement Program.
- 11) Answers to what we can (and cannot do) to reduce volatility of lamb supply, price, and quality.

# Historical Perspective

Provide the history of the evolution and inspiration of the 2013 Lamb Industry Roadmap led by Bob Ludwig, The Hale Group?



# Productivity Improvement



# Genetic Improvement

With productivity improvement, sheep genetics and evaluation can help meet our production goals, describe the tools available and how we can incorporate them into U.S. operations?



# Lamb Supply Chain Seasonality

You sell sheep in 12 months of the year, describe the lamb supply chain seasonality, and how it plays a role as a lamb producer and feeder?



# Productivity Improvement

Your operation thrives on technology, what can producers incorporate that can increase productivity, and how may we best increase U.S. sheep production?



# Product Characteristics



# Non-Traditional Markets

You have seen the transition of lambs to the non-traditional market succeed, describe the shift in production of U.S. producers meeting consumer demands?



# Instrument Grading & Value-Based Marketing

Provide your input and experience with current and future adoption of lamb instrument grading and how this can potentially lead to a value-based marketing system?



# Producer Information

How can information be passed from processor to producers and how management techniques can assist with meeting yield, quality & weight specifications?



# Demand Creation



# Marketing

Your operation thrives on marketing in a variety of venues, what has changed since the 2013 Lamb Industry Roadmap, and how do we continue to respond to meet consumer expectations?



# Year Round Supply

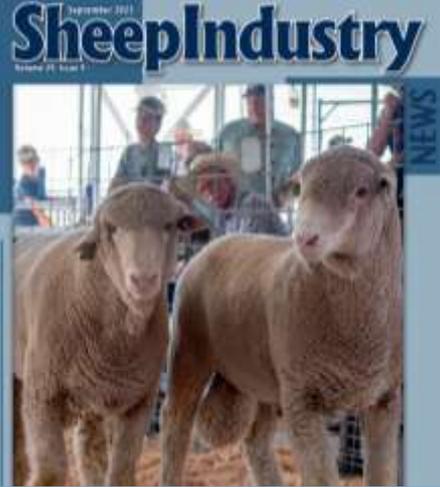
How can producers assist our supply chain provide year-round supply that balances supply/demand expectations?



# American Lamb Image

Describe our evolution in the past decade that is assisting with enhancing the positive image and branding of American Lamb in the marketplace?





# Industry Collaboration



Describe the future direction our U.S. sheep/lamb industry can best address:

Productivity Improvement (David)

Product Characteristics (Karissa)

Demand Creation (Nick)

Industry Collaboration (Dan)

# ASI Lamb Council Survey



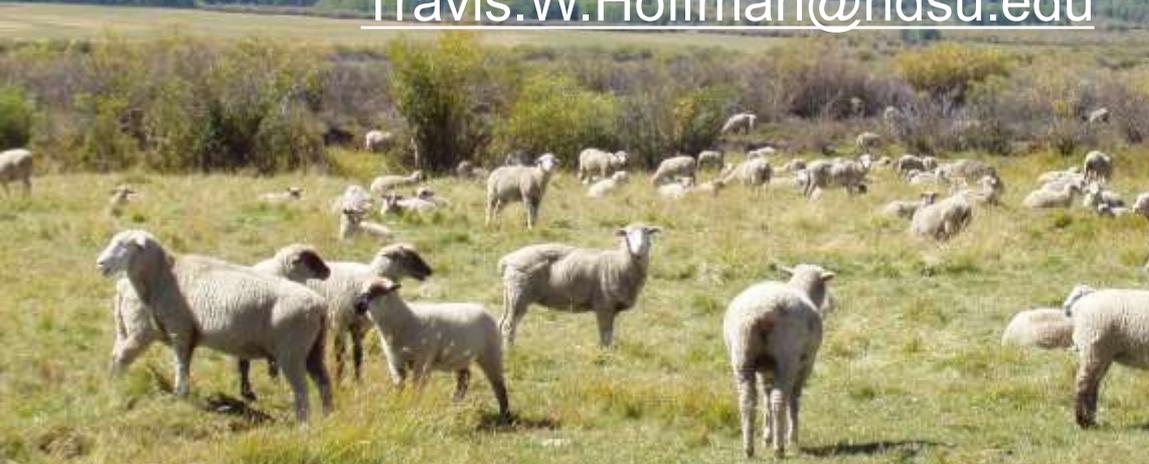
# Questions???

Travis Hoffman, Ph.D.

NDSU/UofM Extension Sheep Specialist/Assistant Professor

701-231-BAAA (2222) / 970-222-7569

[Travis.W.Hoffman@ndsu.edu](mailto:Travis.W.Hoffman@ndsu.edu)



# The American Lamb Supply Chain: Challenges, Opportunities, & Innovation



EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE >> CHANGING LIVES

ASI Lamb Council

**NDSU**

Reno, Nevada

Dr. Travis W. Hoffman

EXTENSION

January 30, 2026

What is the greatest positive shift or success story that has changed in the past 13 years for our industry?

# Answers!

Dan: Our industry has seen a marked improvement in producing lambs for specific markets or uses, with more attention to matching our output to the buyers/consumers preferences. When we are intentional about our output, both the quality and efficiency have improved. This virtuous cycle builds demand and profitability, while reducing the buildup that causes market crashes and the resulting product degradation that follows a crash.

# Answers!

**Nick:** I have noticed since the Lamb Roadmap came out, we are giving the big/small producers, large/small packers, wool sheep/hair sheep breeders, and etc., an opportunity to discover what was going on in all facets the past, present and future of the U.S. Sheep Industry.

# Answers!

David: From coast to coast we have seen the acceptance and adoption of sheep as beneficial graziers. Great opportunities for expansion for current/new producers.

Communities across the U.S. have seen an explosion of restaurants focusing on the authentic cuisine of many different ethnicities. Many of these establishments value American Lamb as a feature menu item, which is a great opportunity for our industry.

# Answers!

Karissa: We still have work to do but industry collaboration is a huge priority that came from the roadmap.

What mission/goal/focus/priority would you add for the vision for greatest potential impact for a 2026 Lamb Industry Roadmap?

# Answers!

Dan: What should we focus on to ensure that the next generation is interested, willing and able to continue the many sheep operations across the country? Particularly in the west, the capital, labor and financial risk exposure seems to be causing the sunsetting of big blocks of production, and the conversion of leases to other uses.

# Answers!

Nick: I really think communicating, open dialog, education and follow through ,is a must in order to make this next roadmap be successful. In one word: UNITY! If the industry can't work together to achieve these new goals, the results will be the same as what happened to the last roadmap.

# Answers!

David: Productivity improvements and capturing new opportunities for growth in our flock are critical for this industry. Our industry is at a pivotal point where we must capture these opportunities in front of us and get on an upward growth track.

# Answers!

Karissa: All sectors collaborating to improve productivity in the U.S. sheep flock.

# Which original action step has the highest potential impact TODAY?

# What should be the top priority for the next decade?

# What should we implement NOW to ensure viability and competitiveness of the U.S. sheep industry in the next decade?



# Accelerated Breeding Program for Fall Lambing



Dr. Travis Hoffman  
Extension Sheep Specialist  
701-231-2222  
Travis.W.Hoffman@ndsu.edu

Producing fall born lambs has several advantages, such as:

- Reduced parasite load
- Availability of high quality feed (crop residue)
- Seasonal high demand for lamb during March-May marketing

This management approach is most likely possible with certain breeds and/or crosses, including: Dorset, Polypay, or Corriedale.

Producers may stretch their resources with effective seasonal marketing for improved yearly income of a sheep venture. Overall, labor and facility utilization, risk mitigation, and management play a role in determining whether to pursue fall lambing in your flock.

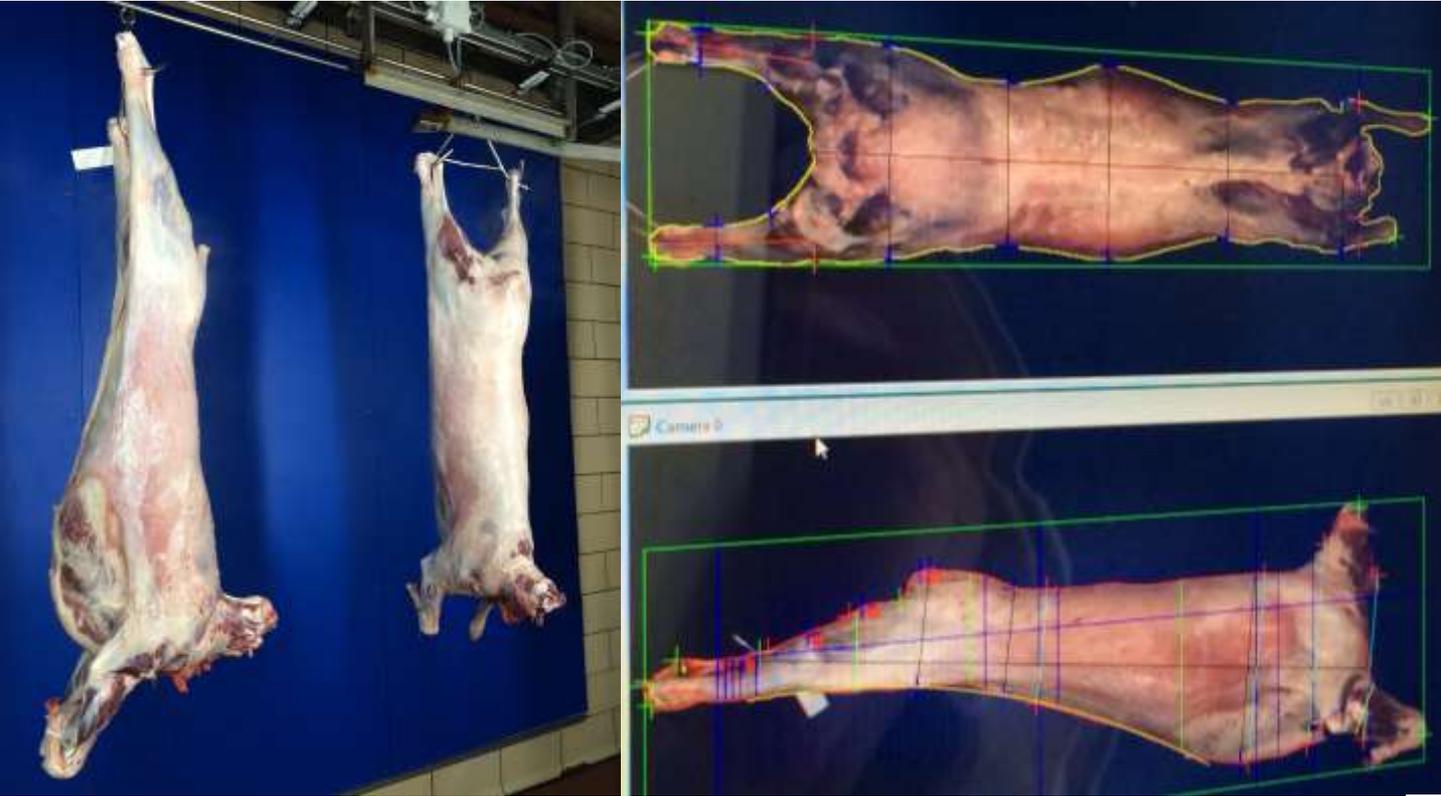
## Calendar

To effectively implement an out-of-season breeding program, not only is the breed of the flock important, but timing is everything. Ewes (and rams) should be analyzed to determine body score (BCS) in March and early April. A 35-50 day breeding season beginning on April 20 is recommended with rams being removed at the end of this period to separate fall and spring lambing groups of ewes.

Lambing Season	BCS Scale 1—5	Flushing Date	Breeding Date (35-50 days)	Lambing Dates	Marketing Opportunities
Fall	2.5—3.5	April 6	April 20	Mid-Sept.—Oct.	March—May
Spring	2.5—3.5	Nov. 6	Nov. 20	Mid-April—May	Oct.—Dec.



# Lamb Instrument Grading



**\*Opportunity for conveying carcass merit to producers.**

**\*Information that can be applied to genetics and management.**



## American Lamb

**Commercial  
comparison of  
USDA Yield  
Grade**

**Left to Right,  
1,2,3,4,5**

**Notice the  
difference in  
external fat and  
carcass shape**

Source: Double J Lamb,  
Hoffman, 2021

# Why do people purchase lamb?



**64% “Taste & Flavor”, Midan Marketing**



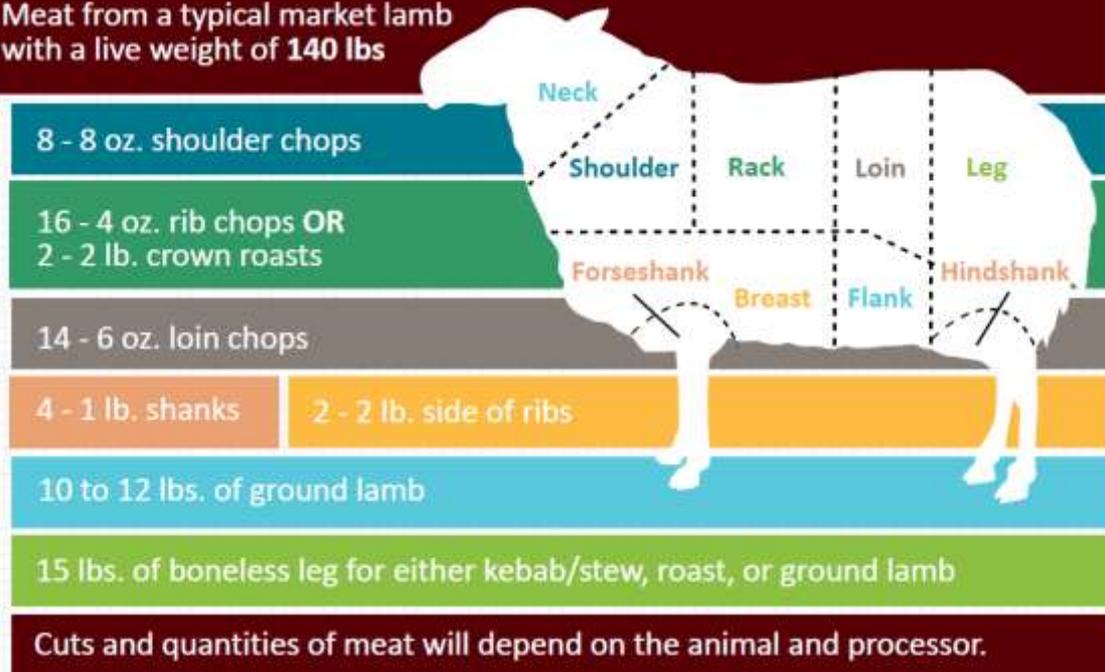
# Ethnic Marketing



# Preparing to Buy a Whole Lamb

How much meat is a whole lamb?

Meat from a typical market lamb  
with a live weight of 140 lbs





Variety =  
The  
Spice of  
Life





<https://apps.ndsu.edu/cas/login?service=https%3A%2F%2Fndstate.co1.qualtrics.com%2Flogin%2Fv1%2Fsso%2Fcas%2Fauth>

[https://ndstate.co1.qualtrics.com/survey-builder/SV\\_dj7z3EsnfYgRISm/edit](https://ndstate.co1.qualtrics.com/survey-builder/SV_dj7z3EsnfYgRISm/edit)

# Dodge Ram 4500



# Ram 450

Please find check to NDSU  
ANPC for \$300 for purchase  
of ram #450 from [REDACTED]  
Let me know if further info is  
needed.

Travis Hoffman

# “Braaad the Sheep”

- Braaad was raised in Carlton, MN
  - Icelandic ram that’s captured hearts on social media was finally caught and returned home.
- Ryan Osvold, (original owner) sold the young sheep to a nearby farm.
- On Oct. 29, 2024, when the ram was getting transferred to its new pen, he escaped; the beginning of an epic journey.
- 3 weeks evading capture:
  - Wandering at least 40 miles from Two Harbors, down the North Shore of Lake Superior, through Duluth and the railyards of Proctor, Volunteer rescue mission accomplished.

