Experiences of the Scott County Katahdin Co-op

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History

Scott County, Virginia is a large mostly rural county located in extreme southwest VA only a few miles from the borders of TN, WV, and KY. It is in the heart of the Appalachian mountain range and as a result, most farmland varies from rolling hills to steep ridgeland with many limestone outcroppings. Much of the land is not suitable for grain farming, and as a result, most farming is centered around grazing livestock until they reach market weight.

Most farms average 60-70 acres, and serve as supplemental or secondary income. Burley tobacco historically has been the main crop, but recent problems with disease, weather, and government quota cuts has left growers looking for other ways to utilize their land. In the late 60's, sheep were popular here and most farms kept at least a few to graze with their cattle. As prices dropped gradually, producers found themselves battling parasites, foot rot, stray dogs, and sold off sheep and switched to cattle and burley. By around 1990, total numbers of sheep in the entire county was 50 head.

In 1997, my uncle and I brought the first Katahdin ewes (15) in from Lexington, Ky. We selected them due to their reputation for low maintenance, and resistance to parasites, foot rot, and other diseases. As word spread about these trouble free sheep, neighbors and other farmers began requesting ewe lambs and demand soon outgrew supply. Fencing and guard animals solved the predator problem and our flocks flourished.

The Co-op

\[ - \text{Getting Started} - \]

Biggest Obstacle: Few members had any previous sheep experience.
Biggest Asset: Few members had any previous sheep experience.

Because this was a new venture, and many people needed education and advice on sheep production, twenty five producers came together in 2000, and formed the Scott County Katahdin Co-op.

We needed and organized plan to address the huge demand for lambs that we were getting. This was a diversified group with some expertise in production, health, and direct marketing. We held quarterly meetings on topics such as selection of breeding stock, lambing, marketing, and other issues as they came up.
**MOST IMPORTANTLY, WE ALL HELD THE COMMON FEELING THAT IF WE WERE GOING TO DO THIS, WE WERE GOING TO DO IT CORRECTLY.**

- Building a Superior Product -

*Goal*: We didn't just want to raise Katahdins, we wanted to raise the best purebred Katahdins to be found east of the Mississippi.

1. We retained only high quality ewes, based on phenotype, milk, and production records.
2. All flocks used similar, high quality rams.
3. All flocks must adhere to our simple but complete health program.
4. All males castrated except top 5% of crop.
5. We ordered supplies and minerals as a group.
6. All flocks must lamb in either Jan. or April.
7. All flocks used same ear tag, which increased our ability to provide large groups of similar lambs from different flocks.

**Marketing: Three Areas**

1. High quality breeding ewes and rams.
   - universities
   - other breeders and producers
2. Market lambs
   - large groups
   - New Holland Sales Stable
   - direct to packers
3. Dressed Lamb
   - whole, halves, cuts, etc.
   - health food stores, religious and ethnic groups, word of mouth

**WE ARE SELLING CONFIDENCE!**

Website placed online (Hillcrest Katahdins) (see KHSI Breeders list) made a huge impact on demand. Referrals from universities and other customers produced many sales. We tell everyone we know about lamb.

**Lessons from New Holland Sales Stable**

1. Be a student of the market report (twice weekly)
2. Know the ethnic calendar
3. Develop a relationship with Ken Smoker
4. Let him know what and when you are delivering lambs.
5. Represent your offering honestly.
6. Feed and water your own lambs (5 to 10 pounds per lamb)
2002 Lamb Crop
- 95 head of breeding rams and ewes to 3 universities averaged $139/hd.
- 225 ewe lambs sold to private individuals averaged $118/hd
- 20 ram lambs privately averaged $125
- 65 wethers (over 100 pounds) killed and direct marketed netted $115
- 195 market lambs to New Holland averaged 79# and .91 cents

Benefits of a Co-op:
1. Group purchasing power.
2. Ability to assemble large orders of similar sheep. (raises asking price)
3. Pride and comraderie among members.
4. Increases marketing options and opportunities.
5. Numbers attract attention from media and others.
6. Massive exchange of knowledge and experience from trial and error
7. Help constantly available

Cons of a Co-op

1. 20% of people do 80% of work.
2. Personality conflicts
3. Telling a member, “they’re not good enough”
4. Members must “play by the rules” or compromise.

Conclusion:
We currently have 32 flocks and 930 ewes enrolled. Morale is high and our members enjoy helping each other. In 2001, Katahdins were 5th nationally in numbers of lambs registered. That doesn’t include more than four times that many that entered commercial production. We are very proud of what we have accomplished and look forward to the future with this great breed of sheep!

FOR QUESTIONS OR TO PLACE ORDERS FOR LAMBS, CONTACT:

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SCOTT COUNTY HAIR SHEEP CO-OP

FLOCK HEALTH PLAN

Winter Lambing

August 1 - examine ewes closely and cull bottom 10% (age, udders, etc.)
- trim feet and deworm all ewes and ram
- begin flushing ewes with 1/2 lb. shelled corn per head
- move to best pasture if available

Sept 1 - put marking harness on ram and turn into ewes
- ewes should start lambing Jan. 24th
- check twice daily and record numbers of ewes that are marked.

Oct 15 - deworm entire flock
- reduce nutrition to pasture and/or hay only

Nov 1 - remove ram from flock

Dec 25 - Jan 1 - deworm ewes
- give 2cc Covexin 8 under skin
- begin 1/2 lb. shelled corn daily
- move ewes to lambing pasture
- prepare lambing barn and pens
- assemble supplies in lambing kit
- enjoy your last 3 weeks of rest for several months

Jan 24 - Feb 28 - check ewes several times daily
- identify lambs and move to jugs for 48 - 72 hours
- dip navels, check udders
- ear tag, castrate males
- increase corn fed to ewes to 1# per lamb per day

Feb 15 - prepare creep feeder and begin creeping lambs

April 1 - deworm lambs and ewes
- give lambs 5cc Covexin 8 under skin

May 1 - give 2cc Covexin 8 to lambs
- decrease grain to ewes

June 15 - deworm ewes and lambs
- wean lambs and move to best pasture
- feed 1-2 lbs grain daily
- select top 10% of ewe lambs for replacements
- sell remainder to contract buyers
- watch market and promote sales of wethers
- invite friends and neighbors over for lamb Kabobs!!