

# DECEMBER 2019 NEWSLETTER



Photo by Crystal Fullerton

## Message from the President

We experienced another hot, dry summer this year in Nova Scotia, with some areas experiencing draught conditions. Fall came quickly with cooler weather approaching early on, potentially impacting harvest times for producers preparing forages.

This was another busy fall for SPANS as we delivered Ewe Lamb Management and Forage and Winter Feeding workshops with Jonathan Wort, Livestock Specialist, of Perennia.

Ewe Lamb Management workshops were offered in both Tatamagouche and Berwick by SPANS and Perennia teaming up to deliver information discussing optimal raising of ewe lambs, from birth to production. Jonathan presented the advantages of breeding ewe lambs if done efficiently, such as improved finances of the sheep operation, improved lifetime production/production potential and reduced greenhouse gases by nearly ten percent over six years, among others. There was a short presentation relating to transportation regulation changes coming into effect February 2020 at the conclusion of this workshop.

Our second project SPANS teamed with Perennia on was the Forage and Winter Feeding workshop, discussed with both beef and sheep components. The goal of this workshop was to educate producers on forage sampling and testing so they are aware of their forage quality, as well as to ensure they are feeding adequate forage for animal requirements to be met at varying life stages. Strategies to deal with forage shortages were also discussed. Local forage tests were distributed to show how to accurately read and interpret the results. These workshops coincided with five of the Safe Handling courses put on by ACMA.

Throughout the fall, six Safe Handling courses, specific to beef and sheep, were offered amongst the province to producers who may require a safe handling course to receive funding for select Nova Scotia programs. These courses were instructed by Jane Morrigan, Animal Welfare and Humane Handling Trainer, Integrity Livestock Services and Miriam Gordon, Program Coordinator for the Animal Welfare Certificate and Professor at Dalhousie University Faculty of Agriculture.

SPANS held their Annual Meeting November 23<sup>rd</sup>, which had great attendance. The SPANS Industry Strategy was discussed, as well as initial plans for the Test Station Modification Program. We also presented Ian and Rhonda McCarron with the title of 2019 Sheep Producers of the Year.



SPANS 2019 Annual Meeting

A reminder to all producers that transportation regulations for livestock are changing February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. The Health of Animals Regulations (HAR) changes will be the new required minimum standard for the transportation of livestock. Some changes to these regulations include transporting young animals who are not yet weaned, as well as the length of travel so rest periods for the animals are a factor for long distances.

Make sure you check the website and social media often for upcoming meetings and workshops.

I wish everyone a happy and safe holiday season. As always, if you have any questions/comments or suggestions for workshops, please don't hesitate to contact the office at 902-893-7455.

Fred Hamilton, President

## 2019 Producer of the Year

Brook Ridge Farm was established in 1998 when Ian and Rhonda McCarron purchased a 200-acre tract of land just west of Antigonish town. Their venture into the sheep industry began with one ewe and her twin lambs, purchased from Ian's father.

Soon after, while on the hunt for a 4H goat, they bought their first Border Leicester ewes and lambs from the late Ralph Downey. Adding to the flock with another small group of Border Leicester's began their interest in this longwool breed. Over the years the McCarrons' focus has been on growing a commercial flock.

Today, they breed Romanovs with Border Leicesters to produce an F1 cross, affectionately known as "White Russians". These crosses are put to Île-de-France rams for market lambs. The flock of purebred and commercial crosses now numbers over 200.

The McCarrons' are shipping members of Northumberland Lamb Co-operative and Rhonda has served on several industry boards, including:

- Eastern Nova Scotia Exhibition
- Antigonish Guysborough Federation of Agriculture
- All Canada Classic Sheep Show and Sale; 2006 Hospitality Chair and 2012 Event Chairperson

Rhonda is presently on her second consecutive term on the Northumberland Lamb Co-operative Board and sits on the board of the Brookside Abattoir Co-Op. For a number of years, the McCarrons were 4H parents and sheep leaders. Brook Ridge Farm is also a past participant of Open Farm Day.

In 2017, Brook Ridge Farm became the first sheep farm in Canada to be certified under The Canadian Verified Sheep Program – CVSP. This feat was accomplished with the assistance of Kara Saville, Program Delivery Manager with the Agri-Commodity Management Association (ACMA).

For close to 20 years, Brook Ridge Farm has been a staple at the Antigonish Farmers' Market. They "niche market" their wool by shipping to MacAusland's Woolen Mills in PEI and sell farm labeled blankets and throws. For the past three years, they have been selling fresh frozen lamb and exclusive to them, lamb pot pies. Last year, with the assistance of Perennia, they were able to have nutrition labeling completed for the pies enabling them to move into the retail market.



*Fred Hamilton, SPANS Chair, presents the 2019 Producer of the Year award to Rhonda and Ian McCarron of Brook Ridge Farm*

## SPANS Industry Strategy Update

Earlier in 2019, representatives from the SPANS Board of Directors met with Minister Colwell to present work they had done on a strategic plan. At that time, the Minister indicated he was interested at naming this initiative as a priority for the Department to assist with. The SPANS Board have demonstrated excellent foresight in their development of a strategic plan and supporting programming.

This fall, a session was hosted for Board Members and other sheep producers to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the industry. This day also had an activity that compared the various components which resulted in the identification of four main overarching goals for the strategy with some sub-initiatives that support each. Moving forward a consultant will be working on consumer and market research to provide us information on what consumers are looking for and how they use lamb, sheep and the products of each (i.e.: milk and wool).

Things planned to be completed between December 2019 and March 2020 are:

- Consumer and Market Research
  - Including discussions with abattoirs in the province – both provincial and federal
- Complete the Strategy Document including:
  - Mission and vision statements
  - An action plan to deliver on the identified goals
- Identification of resources to assist with delivery of goals (both physical and financial)
- Process to achieve the goals and evolve them over time

## Test Station Modification Program

Close access to high demand markets in the US and Canada, continued growth in international demand and ample access to relatively low-cost resources provide the Maritime sheep industry with a unique growth opportunity. Integral to meeting growing demand will be the development of sheep improvement programs, that consider both meat quality and input costs. The Test Station Modification Program takes a strategic approach to developing a breeding objective and supporting resources that take advantage of existing infrastructure and opportunities.

Currently, no central evaluation centre for sheep exists in the Maritimes. Evaluation centres are integral to genetic improvement by providing producers with a location to evaluate their animals under consistent environmental conditions. More breeds are likely to be represented than animals evaluated at a private farm, increasing the accuracy of across breed genetic evaluations. Furthermore, a well-designed evaluation centre has a design and atmosphere that increases buyer attendance and interest in productive and reproductive performance evaluation. This project will seek to take advantage of the Maritime Beef Testing Station (MBTS) in Nappan, NS that currently is not utilized year-round. Modifications to the MBTS GrowSafe system, housing area and handling system will provide the Maritimes sheep industry with an evaluation centre that will be the foundation to a genetic improvement program.

Modifications to the MBTS facility will be completed before Summer 2020 when the first annual central ram evaluation will start. Guidelines and requirements for the central ram evaluation have already been created by AgSights and circulated to producers. Guidelines that ensure fair and precise performance evaluation. Using pedigree, performance and reproductive information collected AgSights will design, calculate and report estimated progeny differences (EPDs) on economically relevant traits such as Lambing Ease, Average Daily Gain and Meat Quality. These EPDs will provide the ram consigner with the most accurate prediction of their ram's genetic merit.

An ongoing part of this project will be to educate sheep breeders and commercial flock operators on EPDs, what they mean, how AgSights should report them, and how producers can use them on their operations. Key to this will be simplicity; EPDs and other information from the central ram evaluation must be reported in a way that producers will understand and use. To do this AgSights will work with specialists in the Maritimes to organize small producer sessions and webinars where reports and tools will be designed using producer input. Leveraging AgSights' existing genetics and performance evaluation tools with the local knowledge and practical skills of producers and specialists will help ensure that the Test Station Modification Program creates a long-term, consistent and leading approach to sheep improvement in the Maritimes.

In summary, the major goals of the Test Stations Modification Program:

- Create guidelines and requirements for a central ram evaluation. – Completed
- Improve the Maritimes Beef Testing Station by modifying the GrowSafe feed intake recording system, housing area and handling system.
- Design and calculate ram performance evaluation traits including estimated progeny differences (EPDs) and selection indexes, that are presented in a simple and usable format.
- Educate sheep breeders and commercial flock operators on performance traits and EPDs, what they mean, and how to use them on their operations, ensuring uptake and continued use.

## Feed shortages impact livestock production costs

Just as weather conditions in Atlantic Canada impacted feed crops, Mother Nature has caused feed shortages across the rest of the country as well.

### Corn production down

Statistics Canada recently reported corn for grain production fell 3.5 per cent due to delayed planting in the spring because of cold and wet conditions, followed by a dry growing season and poor weather during harvest. This was particularly seen in Ontario and Quebec where most corn is grown in Canada.

“At this time, there is still 50 per cent of the corn grain in the field and some soybean as well,” says Christian Duchesneau with the Quebec Forage Council. He says some producers have decided to leave the crops in the ground until next spring because the moisture content is still high and snow in some parts make it tough to harvest.

“They will have no other choice but to buy some of the missing feed, because it's not in their silos,” Duchesneau adds. “So, their cost of production will probably be higher than usual.”

Ontario Forage Council manager, Ray Robertson says Ontario producers reported they had acres that didn't get planted for the first time ever because of the wet spring. Like Quebec, there is still a lot of corn remaining on the fields and some producers have decided to leave it where it is.

“Our corn varieties have changed and have better stand capabilities, so rather than harvest right now when moisture levels are high, they’ll wait to harvest in the spring,” Robertson says.

### Hay stores short

Robertson reports hay stores are also short due to a poor second cut and the need to supplement pastured cattle by feeding bales or stored feed during the drought of early summer. However, the quality of what is available is good, he says.

John McGregor, extension support person with the Manitoba Forage and Grassland Association, says because of the variation of the drought and excess moisture conditions across Manitoba, the amount of feed available and the need to adjust varies greatly around the province. Many producers purchased feed to help cover shortages.

“They are using straw or lower quality forage and supplementing with grain and by-products to bring the nutritional levels up to meet the needs of the cattle,” McGregor says. “Some are grazing standing corn that couldn’t be harvested and others are still baling corn stover to help offset shortages.

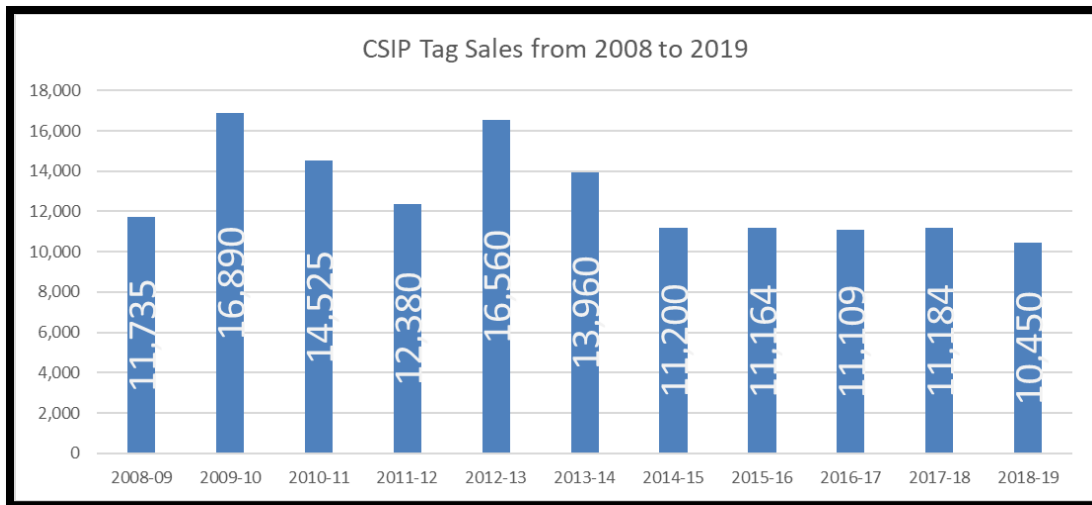
“We are hearing reports of herd reduction with producers selling non-production cows, not keeping replacement heifers and/or selling off whatever cattle they can without hurting production,” McGregor adds.

### Bottom line

Decreased feed stores means livestock producers are facing higher than usual production costs and tough management decisions. Grain and grain by-products as well as other supplementation can help stretch limited roughages.

Trudy Kelly Forsythe, FCC

## CSIP Tag Report



## Commit to Local for the Holidays

The holidays are nearly here and SPANS are issuing a challenge - give a gift that gives back by spending some of your holiday shopping budget locally. This creates a unique shopping experience, while supporting local businesses, local jobs and the local economy. It's easy to do!

Local gifts have a richer story and are often one-of-a-kind, made by talented and creative Nova Scotians who love what they do. There's nothing better than finding that perfect gift and knowing that the person you're giving it to will appreciate the story as much as you do. When you shop at local businesses or buy from local craftspeople, or food and beverage producers, you can't beat the customer service. Nobody knows their products like they do and they are often more than happy to spend the time to make sure you find that ideal gift.



This holiday season, commit to local. Start with one gift or one business at a time! It's not just about gifting; you can also shift your holiday spending to local items such as meats, produce, preserves, baked goods, even local Christmas trees and other holiday décor. You'll be surprised of the number of local choices you can make once you start looking. Happy local holidays from SPANS!

**SHEEP PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION OF NOVA SCOTIA**

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