

Hello fellow NSGP members,

What a trying year 2020 has been so far and its only July! Markets have not been what they should be for any commodity in the state and the fear of the unknown is not helping anyone. I thought for this newsletter article I would focus on something we as producers can definitely take control of and do for ourselves. Indulge me for a minute as I recall part of my experience at the American Lamb Board Summit 2019.

Like many of the sheep producers in our state, I'm what you would call a "small time, hobby farm". None the less, in June of 2019 I received an email from Premier One advertising an upcoming American Lamb Board Summit in Colorado. For some reason, major sheep events rarely happen within driving distance and I had to go. So, in August, I found myself crossing the border into Colorado to take part in my first ever American Lamb Board meeting. Now I would love to tell you how I rubbed elbows with some of the biggest names in the sheep industry and while I did sit with them; mainly I sat and tried to absorb the information/education that had taken many of them years to learn and yet they were willing to share with the rest of us. And yes, if you are wondering by nature I'm an introvert and a book worm who loves taking notes, making lists, and reading; so it takes me a while to really get chatty!

Now being that we are small (35 breeding ewes, Polypay/Tunis) many of the things that the presenters spoke of hadn't really resonated on our farm. We're small, we sell to the local livestock market, or we sell breeding quality lambs and many of these fellow shepherds raised thousands of head of sheep and sold to huge markets; so they were seeing the big picture and feeling economic effects much sooner than our farm. In our little corner of the sheep world, if we made profit after the feed and vet bill we are doing good.

So, when the first presenter that day started off by saying... Lamb needs improving and we need to fix it now so there is a future for the next generation (I'm paraphrasing). I was floored, I did not really know that American shepherds were doing bad. Much of it ties into the fact that America itself and its landscape for shepherds is so varying that there is no one way to raise your flock. Unfortunately, that also does not give the consumer the degree of consistency in product that they see with pork, beef, or chicken. And because no one can tie a specific flavor profile, cooking method, or price point to our product many have not tried lamb; hence the reason lamb is behind. Many presenters that day echoed the same rhetoric, American lamb is behind every market (beef, chicken, pork) and we need be willing to change. But how do we change and why do we need to?

Change is scary, but it must be done, sometimes. While we cannot make everyone raise their lambs the same way; we can become united in our ability to represent our product with the transparency that the consumer is craving. Que to the final presenter of the day wo made it clear that we need to "tell our farms story". We must get out there and present how we raise our lambs and sheep. Consumers, especially millennials/generation z, did not grow up eating lamb but they purchase based on feelings of being connected to the product in which they are consuming. Many of us, myself included, have made Facebook pages and websites, but is that enough?

Cut to global pandemic of 2020, this is the perfect reason why we need to start implementing some of the suggestions that these presenters brought to the table. The telling of your farms story and getting your products out there has never been more important. I have seen loads of Facebook pages pop up, Farm to table, Farm to fork, etc. NSGP even made one, which I think you should advertise your lambs for slaughter on (Pasture to Plate), shameless plug, I know. People are wanting, now more than ever, to buy meat from their farmer down the road. And as sheep and goat producers we have the ability to rise to the top of the "meat pile", so to speak, as the beef and pork industries have unfortunately taken a hit. So, my advice to you, get out there, tell your story, advertise on our Facebook group sales page, and start introducing a whole new generation of consumers to how great American lamb is! With a little will power, some social media, and a new generation ready to try new foods we may just save the American lamb industry.

If you couldn't tell I'm a bit passionate about sheep and dairy goats (but that's another article all together). I am the newest board member of NSGP and our "small time, hobby farm" is located in the Eastern District near Pierce, NE. My husband and I are currently raising, hay, sorghum, wheat, corn/soybeans, lambs, dairy goats, human kids (3), chickens and one duck. We moved back to the family farm in 2016 to help "save it". And three years of farming, 7 years of marriage, and a whole lot of manure scooped by hand our fate is still up in the air. If you are ever in our neck of the woods stop on by and say hi! We can talk sheep, goats, or manure; your choice.

