



# Autumn 2022 Newsletter



## Letter from the President:

Hello,

First off, I want to thank everyone who attended our Second Annual Symposium and Sale in Blountville, Tennessee this past July. It was a wonderful success thanks to our planning committee, speakers, and consignors. Our sale of quality NSIP Katahdins grossed \$72,133.50 for 58 lots. Rams averaged \$939.47, while ewes averaged \$1,681.32. A big thank you to KHSI and the KREG grant program, which helps us to offset expenses for our educational symposium. We are already looking forward to another successful event next year.

Breeding season is upon us, and similar to harvest season, it's a busy time for us producers. Finalizing mating decisions, setting up infrastructure for breeding groups, figuring out where you put the marking harnesses last year...let's just say we have a lot to accomplish this month! Not to mention for some of us, polishing up your sheep GEMS data and submitting to Dr. Lewis before you turn in the rams - more info on that from Tom Hodgman can be found on page 5 of this newsletter.

Every time I read through the newsletter content assembled diligently by our committee led by Kathy Bielek and Roxanne Newton, I learn many new tidbits. This time among them: my wife's feelings about our numerous mating groups. Our blog is also continuing to churn out thought provoking content and strategies. This quarter focuses heavily on flock health and not only preventing infectious diseases, but what to do if you happen to have animals that have come down with OPP. I find it to be particularly helpful and a bit comforting to have a plan should that situation arise on my own farm. Remember, it can happen to anyone!

We have another field day coming up at Tom Perkins' farm in Fombell, Pennsylvania on October 15th. Tom has many years of experience with rotational grazing systems, and we have an exciting and informative group of speakers and list of topics for our field day. Many events with Katahdins tend to take place in the southern US, so we wanted our members in the north to see an operation that is more aligned with their climate and unique circumstances - not to mention less travel time! So we would love to see as many of you as possible at this event, our last time we'll be meeting as a group until 2023.

We plan to continue bringing you rich, informative content on our blog and in this newsletter through the winter. If you have any content suggestions, please reach out to us. You are welcome to share your own knowledge through guest blogs, or we can find another member who has experience with your suggested topic to write about it for us. We can learn so much from one another, and continue to build the EAPK as a great resource for shepherds.

Thank you,  
Brad Carothers

# New on the EAPK Website

## Recently added blogs:

- [Evaluating Online Sheep Experts – EAPK Education Committee](#)
- [Ovine Progressive Pneumonia \(OPP\) – Isabel Richards](#)
- [Protecting Your Flock from Disease – Roxanne Newton](#)

## **Producer Forum**

The 3rd Producer Forum should be posted in the next couple weeks. While there is one more blog planned for later this year, we're already planning ahead for 2023. If this is a feature you enjoy, please help us by suggesting producers you would like to hear from. We plan to use the same format as this year and interview four or five producers with different management from different areas of the country over the course of the year. If you have suggestions, please let Kathy (Kathy.bielek@gmail.com) or Roxanne (mcnjr53@yahoo.com) know.

# EAPK Field Day

at

## Big Tom's Con-o-Creek Farm

Fombell, Pennsylvania

October 15th, 9:00AM - 4:00PM

Register Online:

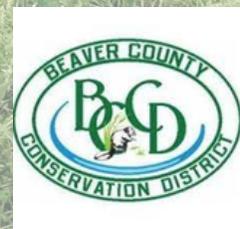
[easternalliancekatahdins.com/events](http://easternalliancekatahdins.com/events)

### **Morning Sessions (Lillyville Church)**

Using NSIP, selecting proper forages for land renovation, benefits of adding sheep to your cattle operation, NSIP producer panel

### **Afternoon Sessions (Big Tom's Con-o-Creek Farm)**

Pasture walks, FAMACHA and body condition scoring, herding dog demonstration



**2022 VA Tech Southwest AREC  
Forage Based Ram Test  
10th Annual Field Day & Ram  
Sale Friday, September 23, 2022**



Currently there are 120 ram lambs on test, consigned by 31 producers from 10 states. Approx. 50 rams will be offered for sale. Rams are either registered or recorded, and a portion will be from NSIP flocks with EBVs. *We evaluate ADG, FEC, and FAMACHA, bi-weekly. All rams offered for sale must pass Breeding Soundness Exam.*

**VA Tech Southwest AREC**

**12326 VPI Farm Rd.  
Glade Spring, VA 24340**

**Field Day Begins at Noon with a Complimentary Lunch provided**

**Ram Sale Begins at 3:00pm**

**Field Day Program includes:**

- Sheep Management Current Topics
- Ram Test Data Summary
- Flock Health Updates

## **EAPK Member Consignors:**

Hound River Farm - Roxanne Newton - Hahira, GA  
Rolling Spring Farm - Lee + Cindy Wright - Glade Spring, VA  
Birch Cove Farm - David Coplen - Fulton, MO  
Beyond Blessed Farm - Chris + Mandy Fletcher - Abingdon, VA  
Gingerich Family Katahdins - Silas + Joe Gingerich - Jonesville, VA  
Round House Farm - John + Sandra Coward - Speedwell, TN  
Chastain Brothers - Kent Chastain - Delano, TN  
Cedar Creek Farm - Michael Stumpff - Georgetown, TN  
Morehead State University - Patricia Harrelson - Morehead, KY  
Ewe Lamb Right Farm - Dan + Jan Tuner - Shippensburg, PA  
Old Slate Farm - Katie + Brad Carothers - Mount Vernon, OH



VIRGINIA AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION  
SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA AGRICULTURAL  
RESEARCH AND EXTENSION CENTER  
VIRGINIA TECH.

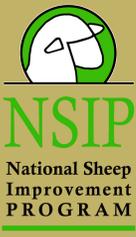
**For More Info Contact:**

**Lee Wright, SWAREC [lrite@vt.edu](mailto:lrite@vt.edu) 276-944-2200**

**OR**

**Dr. Scott Greiner, VT [sgreiner@vt.edu](mailto:sgreiner@vt.edu) 540-231-9159**

**Website - <https://www.apsc.vt.edu/extensionandoutreach/Sheep-Extension/sheep-programs/swarec-ram-test.html>**



# NSIP Update

*A New Year Begins for Sheep GEMS*

*Tom Hodgman, Katahdin Breed Representative*



For many of us, the arrival of late summer and the preparations for another breeding season signify the beginning of a new production year. Our thoughts, at least mine, shift to what the new lamb crop might look like, and just as important, how those lambs will perform in our management programs. For those of us enrolled in the Sheep GEMS project, we complete the year with submission of the previous season's data while beginning the production year with renewed assessment and data collection in our flocks.

The research team behind Sheep GEMS also sees the "end" of the current sheep production year and the "start" of a new one. With the onset of breeding season, participating "Innovation Flocks" have been asked to submit their data for what might be considered an abbreviated first year. In 2022, the project began well after the traditional breeding season had taken place. Consequently, most of us collected data on our ewes only around the time of lambing and again at weaning. These data, together with those on our lambs, need to be entered in the most recent Excel spreadsheet (See email from Dr. Lewis dated 8/19/22) and submitted to Dr. Lewis at the end of the production year (prior to breeding season). He will review your submission and offer corrections to keep your data consistent with those of the roughly two dozen other participating flocks. Doing so now will save time later and ensure quality data comes in from every flock.

As we assemble our breeding groups and prepare to turn rams in, please don't forget to record body weight and a body condition score for each breeding ewe. A FAMACHA score would be useful too. It's the change in these measurements over time that demonstrate the resiliency of individual ewes to environmental and management changes over time. And don't forget to punch a TSU on any of the sires you will be using, if they haven't been genotyped already. But, please do so before they go in with the ewes. As we all know, sometimes rams don't always return from these assignments and the sire genotypes are especially important. All of these points and more were made during two recent Zoom webinars with Dr. Lewis. If you missed them, or are still curious about Sheep GEMS, the second webinar can be viewed at your convenience [here](#).

As the temps begin to decline, and the season shifts from summer to autumn, Sheep GEMS enters a new production year. With your help and timely submission of your data, we can keep the project on track to further improve our breed and advance our industry in our everchanging environment. As always, don't hesitate to reach out to me ([hodgmans@msn.com](mailto:hodgmans@msn.com)) or others in Sheep GEMS (or NSIP) with questions.



# EAPK Members in the News

EAPK member Tom Perkins hosted a pasture walk at his farm in Fombell, Pennsylvania, on August 23rd. The event was co-hosted by the local NRCS office and Beaver County Conservation. Tom shared his hiccups and triumphs with the attendees, and featured speaker Russ Wilson shared his experiences managing a grazing operation, focused on soil health and minimizing inputs on your farm. More on this event can be found [here at Farm and Dairy Magazine](#), article by EAPK member Rachel Wagoner.



## Timely Tip: Should you Flush your Ewes?

Flushing is the practice of supplementing ewes with high quality pasture, hay or grain (ideally in the form of energy) around breeding time. The objective is to boost ovulation, conception and implantation rates by increasing their plane of nutrition 2-3 weeks before breeding through the first 2-3 weeks after breeding. Studies have shown up to a 25% increase in ovulation rates when ewes are flushed and a reduction in spontaneous embryonic deaths caused by poor maternal nutrition. Flushing is less effective in ewes that are over-conditioned. Ewe lambs are less responsive to flushing than adult ewes.



# Managing Feed Costs in a Time of Expensive Inputs

*Dr. Andrew Weaver, Extension Small Ruminant Specialist, NC State*

As we enter the fall and look ahead to winter feeding months, hay prices continue to climb. With feed accounting for more than 50% of production costs, managing these expenses is critical to remaining profitable in current times. Two strategies for decreasing feed costs are: 1) extending the grazing season to reduce hay feeding; and 2) making smart hay purchasing decisions to get the most out of your investment.

The grazing season can be extended with improved forage management. With cattle, the Amazing Grazing team at NCSU has coined the term “POW - The Power of One Wire.” Unfortunately, many of our sheep do not respect one wire. While we may have to use multiple wires or poly-net with sheep, the principles of POW still apply with regard to the benefits of temporary fencing. Rotational grazing practices can improve forage utilization, increase forage yield, and improve stand health. Stockpiling, to increase the amount of forage available for grazing in the fall

months, can be facilitated by resting pastures (excluding sheep) with temporary fencing. Even when cooler weather sets in, stockpiled forage can allow grazing to continue late into fall or early winter. This extended grazing season prolongs the need to start feeding hay (feeding \$150/ton hay is equivalent to approximately \$0.32/ewe/day).

When it comes time to purchase hay, cheaper isn't always better. Knowing the quality of the hay you plan on purchasing can provide valuable information for purchasing decisions. One way to assess the economic value of hay is by calculating the cost per unit of nutrient, specifically TDN (total digestible nutrients, our measure of energy) and CP (crude protein). This can be done with a few easy steps using your forage analysis results.

- 1) Determine pounds of DM (dry matter) in one ton of hay by multiplying % DM by 2000.
- 2) Determine pounds of TDN and CP in one ton of hay by multiplying % TDN and % CP by your answer from step 1.
- 3) Determine cost per unit of TDN and CP by dividing hay cost per ton by pounds of TDN and CP from step 2.

While you might pay more per ton, a higher quality hay may actually be a cheaper source of energy and protein. These same steps can be used to evaluate supplemental feeds as well.



Hay Sample*	\$/ton	% TDN	% CP	\$/lb. TDN	\$/lb. CP
1	\$150	58%	13%	\$0.147	\$0.656
2	\$130	52%	10%	\$0.142	\$0.739

\*assume both hay samples are 88% DM

See the example with two hay samples. While hay #1 costs \$20/ton more, cost per lb. of TDN is similar and cost per lb. of CP is actually less due to the higher protein concentration. This means for every pound of protein your sheep need, you can feed it for less with hay #1. Alternatively, for the same cost, your sheep are getting additional protein by feeding hay #1.

Knowing the price of hay is important; but so is knowing bale weights. When you buy an 800 lb. bale, does it really weigh 800 lb.? If that \$60 bale that you thought weighed 800 lb. actually weighs 725 lb., cost per ton for that hay is increased \$15. Be sure you're getting what you pay for.

Lastly, minimize hay waste. No hay feeder is perfect but some are better than others at minimizing the amount of hay that ends up as bedding. Keeping your hay dry and purchasing higher quality hay that is more palatable can also help as ewes will desire to eat more and waste less. If ewes waste 15% of your 800 lb. bale, they're only eating 680 lb. of the bale you paid \$60 for. This increases the cost per edible ton from \$150 to \$176. The combination of hay waste and inaccurate bale weights quickly add up to substantial feed investment loss. Managing feed costs with these simple methods offer cost saving opportunities, regardless of geographical location. Extending the grazing season with improved forage management, and sound hay buying strategies provide options for financial improvement. These management practices and decision-making factors could have an impactful difference on your operation's bottom line.



# Small Farm Ram Management Options

**By: Allison Rudd, EAPK Member**

Breeding season is here and if you want to add lambs to your flock next year you are going to need a ram. Timing your lambing to suit your schedule requires you to keep a ram separate until you're ready to introduce him to your ewes. Keep in mind, rams of different ages have different feed requirements for maintenance and must be housed with companions as they too, need a 'flock' to keep stress low and maintain a calm disposition. Keeping rams and ewes separate requires maintaining two different groups most of the year. A little creativity may be necessary in supporting your ram(s) on your small farm.

Keeping one ram may be your only option for your farm size and budget. If your goals include producing replacement ewes and/or breeding stock, a high-quality ram is essential. High quality rams aren't cheap and need to be replaced fairly often to avoid inbreeding. If your goal is market lambs, a terminal sire can be retained for several years. In either instance, acquire a wether 'buddy' to be his companion. The wether can stick around for years, even after you have had to replace your single ram. Wether companions don't have the hormonal drive to fight, so they are suitable as a singleton companion for your ram. The wether can also be conveniently kept with your ewes if you're 'in between' rams.

If you have more space and resources to accommodate a small group of rams, frequent replacements aren't necessary. With unrelated rams, you can breed small groups of ewes to each ram and then switch breeding groups successively each year to maintain genetic diversity in your flock.



Using a marking harness can help you determine lambing dates



Ram lamb turned out with ewes.

Some atypical ram management options include but aren't limited to: Purchasing or retaining a meat lamb to breed then butchering him; sharing a ram with another small producer; leasing a ram; or keeping your ram with your ewes most of the year. Quality could be an issue with using a meat lamb as a sire of your future lamb crop. If you are very low on funds or are incapable of managing two groups, or if your goal is strictly meat lambs, it is a feasible option. Leasing a ram is cost effective option 'if' it is accessible. Leasing a ram allows a small farm to operate without the management responsibility involved with a ram or group of rams. A mutual and trustworthy relationship between the predominant farm and the lessee must exist for the arrangement to work for both parties. There are obvious biosecurity and liability risks that are shared between the two farms. An agreement (written or otherwise) might be of benefit to both parties. Another less common alternative is keeping the ram with the ewes from the time of introduction during breeding season through lambing and sometimes even lactation. The ram could be removed around weaning and put with the group of ram lambs until they are sold off or the ewes are ready to be rebred. There are obvious drawbacks to this approach and a ram with a suitable attitude is absolutely necessary for human, ewe and lamb safety.

All of these alternatives to keeping a working ram(s) have their advantages and disadvantages. Some of these options may be the only reasonable choice for some small farms due to financial/resource availability. Work closely with a mentor and established flock, talk with other small shepherds, share experiences, and experiment with different ram management options to find the best fit for your farm.

**The upcoming SWAREC ram test sale is a great opportunity to add a tested ram to your flock on September 23rd.**



[Link to 2022 SWAREC Ram Test Sale Videos](#)



# KHSI Update

## Dan Turner, KHSI President

In the last issue of this newsletter, Robert Walker mentioned that he was writing his "KHSI Board eulogy". He served KHSI honorably for six years as a board member and spent the last year as President of KHSI. Many thanks to Robert for being such an active and effective leader. With Robert's encouragement, and the vote of the other board members, I am now the President of KHSI, so this must be my engagement announcement? The other KHSI board members are Larry Weeks (VP), Mandy Fletcher (Secretary), Howard Covington (Treasurer), Cindy DeOrnellis, Karen Kenagy and Justin Fruechte.

It is an honor to serve in this capacity and I am excited to be a part of the EAPK, as it has such a positive message about Katahdins and strives to promote the viability of Katahdins as a true agricultural resource. The KHSI KREG (Katahdin Regional Education Grant) program is a major member benefit that financially helps regional clubs to provide educational programs. Seeing the participation and the results of the sale from the EAPK Symposium in Blountville, TN reinforces to the board that this program is a great tool for outreach. Congratulations to all who have worked so hard to build the newly formed EAPK to be such a resource to all who utilize the plethora of materials and benefits that it provides. I believe regional groups are a great resource for KHSI and it is exciting to see what EAPK has created in just a few years.

The KHSI Expo in Cookeville, TN was a great success. About 230 participated in the educational seminars and workshops and many more arrived on sale day. The Expo had something for everyone: a herding dog exhibition, hair coat inspection class, and seminars from leading experts on grazing, forages, parasites, genetics and health. The sale was amazing. Animals averaged over \$1,200/head and grossed over \$200,000. The KHSI board is now forming the committee structures, and we welcome anyone interested in serving on a committee. The committees accomplish many tasks, and we need to encourage new members to volunteer, collaborate and network with fellow Katahdin producers to further KHSI goals in serving our members. If you're interested in joining a committee, contact Operations at [info@khsi.org](mailto:info@khsi.org).

The Katahdin breed association appears to be as strong as ever promoting and representing Katahdin producers. We continue to be the leader in number of animal registrations and transfers among U.S. sheep breeds. There are more and more university research flocks using Katahdins which helps introduce the benefits of Katahdins to students as well as farmers who apply their research to their operations. This is just one more vote of confidence for Katahdins – A Breed Whose Time has Come!

# Timely Topic: Selecting for Maternal Traits Drives Profit

By Lynn Fahrmeier

*The following is an [excerpt from a blog](#) posted in November 2021.*

In addition to being a shedding hair breed, Katahdins have always been viewed as an easy keeping maternal breed. ... We know that the number one predictor of profitability in a ewe flock is the “Pounds of Lamb Weaned per Ewe Exposed.” This metric combines several maternal traits. ... Regardless of the management, environment, or marketing goals of a flock, it is important that Katahdin breeders never forget to select for good maternal traits.

It is not the purpose of this article to define what level of selection pressure any producer should place on maternal traits, but some guidelines might be (useful). First, do you know what your lambing percentage per ewe exposed is? How about weaning percentage per ewe exposed? What percentage of your ewes lamb in the first 17 days of the lambing season? Shepherds need some basic records to track these key measurements. Second, one easy method to improve your flock is to cull the bottom 10-15% of your flock each year. Ewes that don't breed should always be culled. Ewes that have a history of lambing twins or triplets and only raising a single should also be culled. Ewes that have twins and raise two runts should be culled. Culling the bottom is the easiest way to raise the average of your flock. Third, selecting the best ewe lambs and buying the best rams that meet your goals and priorities will keep raising your flock average in the future.

... Katahdins fit into commercial flocks well as a maternal ewe breed that can be crossed with terminal sires to produce market animals for either the light lamb market or, with some different selection pressure, the traditional lamb market. ... It is maternal traits that drive profit in the commercial lamb industry followed by low ewe maintenance cost. ... Medium sized ewes that have low maintenance cost that easily raise twins and sometimes triplets will be the most profitable ewes in a flock. Dr. Charles Parker called them the Madams of a ewe flock and encouraged shepherds to identify and select for those special ewes.



# TIMELY TIPS: BREEDING SEASON

## Ram to Ewe Ratio

The number of ewes that a ram can breed in a 34-day breeding season (two full cycles) varies based on the age and experience of the ram, the environment in which the ram is working (climate and terrain), the size of the pasture and the number of ewes cycling at one time. Typically, a mature ram can service 3-4 ewes per day. The recommended ratio for mature rams is 1:35 to 50 ewes. Ram lambs (7-8 months old) should be limited to 15-20 ewes and should have reached at least 50-60% of their mature weight. If ewes are synchronized, more ram power will be required.



## Preparing Rams for Breeding

Ideally, rams should have a breeding soundness exam 2-3 weeks prior to breeding to determine semen quantity and quality. This is especially important for out of season breeding or if breeding is planned during hot weather. Rams should have a body condition score of 3.5 at the start of breeding. Underconditioned rams should be placed on a rising plane of nutrition 6-8 weeks before breeding. Two to three weeks prior to breeding, the ram should be dewormed and his hooves should be inspected and trimmed.

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## Are you a Ram Hoarder?

Katie Carothers, EAPK Member

Are you a ram hoarder? Can't decide which rams to use, so your solution is to use all of them? Only have about six acres to work with, and six breeding groups to divide on this tiny plot?

Join the club! Breeding season is a bit of a headache for the zealous NSIP producer. The proliferation of quality rams for sale on easy-to-use online auction platforms has fueled my husband's addiction. I have begrudgingly agreed to manage six groups, using some strategies I'd like to share with the group.

Our freshly seeded large pastures are on lockdown from the sheep while the seedlings gain momentum prior to going dormant this winter, so all of our matings are taking place on our home farm. We subdivide our fields with hot electroneet to discourage frisky behavior through fence lines. Putting rams of equal stature on either side of a cold fence will result in some redecorating when the rams want to jockey for position over the day's ewe in standing heat.

To help minimize the daily task of feeding and watering seven groups of sheep (six breeding groups, plus another group of clean up rams and meat lambs slated for winter processing), we have been allowing the forage to grow up in the fields for the past several months. Our years of selecting for parasite resistance come in handy during breeding season, since the animals will be continuously grazing during this time.

We'll unroll hay in these fields over the winter to add back some organic matter to lessen the impact of several weeks of overgrazing. We'll supplement all groups with soyhull pellets in our Advantage feeders, which are double sided and one feeder can service two groups. We'll utilize automatic waterers in order to lessen the time it takes to complete our chores. Although this means investing in several hundred feet of hoses, the time saved by not hauling water to many watering points daily is well worth it.



## Upcoming Events

- SWAREC Ram Test Sale, September 23rd, Glade Spring, VA
- EAPK Field Day, October 15, Fombell, PA
- EAPK Open Discussion Forum – Third Monday of each month at 7:00 PM EST via Zoom
- NSIP Open Discussion Forum – First Wednesday of every month at 12:00 CST via Zoom

### Board of Directors

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Tom Hodgman - Vice President  
Kathy Bielek - Secretary  
Roxanne Newton - Treasurer  
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