

A Big Prairie Perspective

Mark Meurer, President

Greetings from the Big Prairie of northern Illinois! In the past ten days we've had 80 degree temperatures, freezing temperatures, rain, snow and sunshine. Welcome to the Midwest in the Fall! You just never know what Mother Nature will bring. All in all, the weather has been cooperative for a successful harvest and we achieved a record-breaking Fall lambing drop rate, here at Big Prairie Polypays. Since finishing up our naturally-conceived, Fall lambing group we've achieved a 230% drop rate on our Fall ewes. I'll take that any year. I hope everyone else is experiencing the same success.

As I write this article for the Fall edition of the APSA Newsletter, we are on the verge of entering the Holiday Season. The Halloween decorations have been replaced with Christmas trees, lights, ornaments and wreaths. I don't know about you, but I'm ready for some normalcy and gathering together with family and friends for Holiday cheer. What a year we've all experienced! I'm looking forward to 2021 and hopefully an uneventful year.

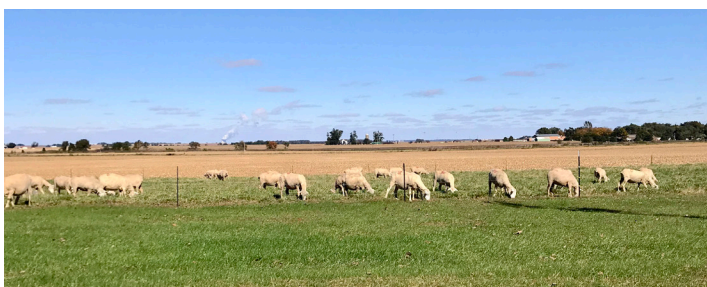
As a Board, we look forward to our summer sales and have begun the planning for this upcoming year. We are hoping that the Midwest Stud Ram Sale and the NSIP Sale in Spencer, IA will be in person and back to normal. The APSA Annual Meeting will again be held in Spencer, as turn out has been very good for our annual gathering at that location.

Planning continues for a revived youth movement within the APSA, as the board continues to investigate opportunities to involve more young people with the Polypay breed. We'll unveil some great opportunities this winter.

The Board is also investigating some cutting-edge opportunities to incorporate genomic testing within our breed. Getting DNA information and being able to identify economically important genomic traits is

APSA Board of Directors

Mark Meurer, President	2023-1
1669 Midway Rd. Ashton, IL 61006 meurer66@gmail.com	815-973-5576
Bryce Freking, Vice-Pres.	2022-2
924 35th St. Ceylon, MN 56121 frekingpolypay@gmail.com	605-310-0733
John Anderson, Secretary	2022-2
10131 Munson Rd. Shreve, OH 44676 johnwallaceanderson@gmail.com	330-749-9053
Chris Kaeb, Treasurer	2021-2
639 N. 1000 E Rd. Buckley, IL 60918 cakfarm@gmail.com	815-457-2618
Jeremy Refshaw	2021-2
1339 290th St. Waubun, MN 56589 refshawranch@yahoo.com	218-230-5383
Kathy Ewert	2022-2
20009 62nd St. McLouth, KS 66054 kmewert@embarqmail.com	913-796-6044
Mark Van Roekel	2023-2
3891 390th St. Orange City, IA 51041 mandbvr@gmail.com	712-737-8205



something the Board is excited about. We want the Polypay breed to be in the forefront of this important research. Being able to get information directly from the genes and removing any environmental influences is extremely exciting technology.

The Polypay breed has some exciting things ahead! Demand for Polypay genetics continues to be strong and the future of the sheep industry is looking positive. Prices are up, more slaughter facilities are opening and demand for lamb is increasing. Polypays will continue to lead as “America’s Production Breed” as we strive to meet the commercial sheep producer’s needs.

As I close, please have a wonderful Holiday Season! Don’t forget to give “Thanks” for all the many blessing we have in this great country and enjoy a beautiful Christmas Season as we celebrate the birth of Christ! Blessings to you and your families and please give me a call if you ever have questions or concerns. Happy Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas!



Your Newsletter

If you have any articles you want to write, news you want to pass on, or pictures you’d be willing to put in the newsletter, please send them to Mark Meurer at meurer66@gmail.com. Let us all see and hear what’s going on in your corner of the Polypay world.

Supply Chain Bottleneck

When it comes to processing lambs, 2020 has been full of twists and turns. The arrival of the COVID-19 virus exposed a logjam in the meat supply line. Though they were considered essential, and thus tried to stay open and functioning, major lamb packers were not designed to handle a contagious virus. Due to both viral infections and fears of viral infections, large packing plants either shut down or greatly curtailed operations. Unable to market meat animals or to buy meat in the stores, producers and the public turned to small local processors. The local processors were swamped, and it is still the case. Many, if not most, local meat processors are booked six months to over a year out.

In addition to Covid-19, the American sheep industry was hit hard by the bankruptcy of Mountain States Rosen in Greeley. The purchaser, JBS, that markets imported lamb, is shifting the MSR plant away from lamb.

Fortunately, a new packing plant, Colorado Lamb Processors, opened for business in Brush, east of Greeley, in September. They will have a kill capacity about the same as the closed MSR plant, but will lack the fabricating ability.

Another positive development is the purchase of an old, idle plant in Texas by Double J Meat Packing. When up and running, it will do both slaughter and fabricating.

Things seem to have settled out a bit and lambs are being processed. The local plants are still very busy, but the supply chain has been restored, and the price for lambs has been quite good. This should be a wakeup call for the industry to look at how the supply chain can be made less vulnerable.

Advertise

Advertising in the APSA newsletter is available.

Rates are

Full Page: \$85

7.5”w x 10”h

Half Page: \$45

7.5”w x 5”h

Quarter Page: \$25

7.5”w x 2.5”h

3.75”w x 5”h

Ads you would like put in the Winter newsletter would need to be sent to brettpharo@gmail.com by January 15.

Annual Membership Meeting

The APSA board voted in their October meeting to hold the 2021 annual membership meeting of the APSA at Spencer, IA, in connection with the Center of the Nation NSIP sale. Watch for more details in the Winter newsletter.

New legislation to expand local meat processing capabilities

Large meat and poultry processing plants across the country have been shutting down due to COVID-19 outbreaks. The pandemic has underscored the lack of resilience in the meat and poultry processing sectors, shining a new light on a longstanding problem. As a result, consumers have shown an increased interest in buying local products, including meat and poultry. To support that interest, new legislation has been introduced to assist smaller processing facilities.

Rep. Chellie Pingree (D-Maine) and Rep. Jeff Fortenberry (R-Neb.) introduced legislation this week to support small meat and poultry processors. The Strengthening Local Processing Act will expand options for local producers and assist smaller facilities as they adapt to the coronavirus pandemic and expand to meet demand.

“Maine has almost 3,400 diversified small farms that raise livestock, but our farmers have to book their dates as soon as the hooves hit the ground because the processing availability is so strained,” said Pingree. “Under the Strengthening Local Processing Act, our state would have increased slaughter and processing capacity, allowing us to produce much more meat and chicken right here in Maine. This legislation would bring much needed relief to Maine farmers, offer support for Maine’s small slaughterhouses and butchers, many of which are family-owned businesses, and allow consumers to access the local products they desire, especially during this time of disruption to the national supply chain.”

“There is a broadening concern over corporate concentration in the meatpacking industry. In a previous time, we had more local meat processing. This bill helps stimulate a return to that previous model, creating a robust market in local economies, linking the farm to the family,” said Fortenberry.

Under federal law, in order for a farmer or rancher to sell individual cuts of locally raised meats they must first send their animals to one of a limited number

of U.S. Department of Agriculture or state-inspected slaughterhouses. These slaughterhouses are sometimes hundreds of miles away and there are far too few of them across the nation. As a result, many smaller meat and poultry processing plants are booked out for months, and small farms are unable meet new demand due to a lack of processing capacity.

The Strengthening Local Processing Act will increase the federal share of costs for state inspection from 50 to 65 percent and for Cooperative Interstate Shipment (CIS) facilities from 60 to 80 percent, thus encouraging more states to operate state inspection programs and participate in CIS. There are currently 27 states that operate a state inspection program and eight states that participate in CIS. The legislation would also authorize competitive grants to small and very small establishments, state inspected facilities, custom exempt facilities, or new small-scale slaughter facilities for activities related to COVID-19 response and recovery. It would also authorize a new \$10 million grant program for colleges and universities to establish or expand meat processing training program and a new \$10 million grant program for small and very small establishments or nongovernmental organizations to offset the cost of training new meat processors.

“Small plants play a critical role in ensuring farmers and ranchers are able to process their products, especially during the increase in demand for more local and regional meat and poultry during the COVID-19 pandemic. This bill is a strong step towards ensuring scale-appropriate regulations and support for small plants that maintain and pursue federal and state inspection,” said Kelly Nuckolls, Policy Specialist, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition

SPONSORED CONTENT ON AGDAILY





View from the Great Lakes State

Brett Pharo

As breeders of Polypay sheep, we are blessed with a breed that is very versatile. From coast to coast Polypays are adapting to management systems from near total confinement to near total pasture systems. Some are lambing in Winter, some in Spring, some in Fall, and many in all three. Polypays are being used in registered flocks and purebred commercial flocks. They are providing the maternal foundation for crossing with terminal sires. They are popular for use as recip ewes. Yes, ours is a breed with much to offer.

So what should our emphasis be as breeders of registered Polypay seedstock? Certainly, that will be different for each one of us. Each of us strives to produce quality Polypay sheep. For some there may be an emphasis for show ring performance; for some the emphasis may be for high EBVs or Indexes; for some it might be to top a sale; for some it may be growth, or prolificacy, or parasite resistance, or

Any of those options may be the right option for our personal flocks. That said, how can we best serve the industry at large? Polypays were developed with the purpose of enhancing the commercial sheep industry.

Let's take a look at commercial producers, those with at least several hundred to a few thousand ewes and making their money selling feeders, market lambs, and wool. What do they need from us, the seedstock producers? The details of that will vary, as those operations vary greatly in management style and location. What doesn't vary is that they need the sheep they buy from us to make them as profitable as possible.

As we make breeding decisions to meet that de-

mand, what do we maximize in our production?

Is maximum always optimum? For something like parasite resistance, it would seem so. For other traits, not so much. For instance, whereas for a smaller operation with confined lambing and fed a high concentrate diet, triplets might be very desirable. But for a larger operation lambing on the open range or on open pastures without concentrate supplement, twins might be better.

Growth would be another trait where maximum may not always be optimum. Why? A couple of reasons. First, selecting for maximum growth will end up producing a flock with bigger ewes. The maintenance feed costs of a ewe is directly related to the size. If a commercial producer can run 1000 ewes that weigh 190, he could maybe run 1180 that weigh 160. It would be more profitable to get his growth from a terminal sire on some of his ewes. Of course, the longevity of Polypay rams versus some of the terminal sires negates part of that. Second, a ewe lamb with high growth numbers will likely put on more frame and less condition growing on grass. That can affect both conception and milk production the first year.

Polypay sheep are indeed very versatile and can excel in most any system they are placed in, so long as they are selected for that system. Each of us has particular trait levels that are optimum for our operation, and each of us has customers with various optimum trait levels. Our customers have operations that range from very intensive to very extensive, and from small hobby farms to large commercial operations. We can meet those needs, but must keep in mind the differing needs and not get caught up on one trait or one production number.

