

Summer 2023

Tomorrow's Sheep Today

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A Big Prairie Perspective

Mark Meurer, President

A few weeks after my oldest son graduated from college, I realized that the prayers and conversations I had with him on the way to grade school and high school each morning had worked. During a ceremony that took place after graduation, my son stood in his dress blue uniform before a large group of friends and family and took the solemn oath as an officer in the United States Marine Corps. He was now entering a new chapter of life as a 2nd Lieutenant in the USMC. As he turned to the crowd to say a few words about his ceremony, he looked into my eyes and said this, "Today, Dad, I want you to know that the prayer you prayed over me every day on the way to school has come to pass. You always prayed that I would be a leader and not a follower. Today, your prayer has been answered." Tears ran down my face and I realized that he had listened. More importantly, God listened, and He answered. I learned a valuable lesson that day.

Leading and not following is a foundation to a positive and productive life. Being a good example that others want to follow is paramount. Whether in the military, on a sports team, in a community group, church or raising livestock, we should all strive to lead. I'm grateful that Polypay breeders across the country are leaders in the success of the commercial sheep industry.

Because our breed is a leader, Polypay genetics are everywhere! During a conversation I had with our Starter Flock grant recipient this year, we discussed how much influence the Polypay breed has within the sheep industry. Some producers are using our genetics and don't even know it! We continue to lead with an influence that we may not even realize.

We as a breed association need to continue to lead and not follow. We need to lead in research, testing, phenotypic evaluation and youth development, just

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2023 Annual Membership Meeting

The annual meeting of the APSA membership was held July 28th in Spencer, IA, and was accessible to the membership via zoom. Minutes of the meeting can be found on the APSA website.

Big Prairie Cont.

to name a few things. We need to strive to produce sheep with genetic merit and excellent phenotype and conformation. Our genetics need to lead commercial producers to the next level.

I have been given the great honor of serving as the APSA president for the next year. This will be my fourth year as president and I look forward to serving our association, again. We have a tremendous APSA board (including newly elected board member, Scott Wollin) that cares for our breed with all their hearts. We, along with your help, will strive to keep our breed as a leader and not a follower within the commercial sheep industry.

As always, if you have any questions or just want to chat, please give me a call at any time. Let's continue to be leaders and not followers!

Respectfully,
Mark
APSA President

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 Fall newsletter should be sent to brettpharo@gmail.com by Oct. 15.



Starter Flock Winner

The APSA is excited to introduce this year's recipient of the APSA Starter Flock Grant. This year's winner is Jessica Bartmann from Greeley, CO. Jessica was selected from several excellent applicants because of her knowledge of the sheep industry and the Polypay breed. Jessica has a vision to increase her starter flock so she can help impact the commercial sheep industry through improved Polypay genetics. Jessica and her family were in attendance for the annual meeting and she offered her thanks and appreciation to the APSA for their generosity. The Starter Flock Grant is a \$2000 grant that allows the selected young producer to purchase their first Polypay genetics. Also, the winner of the grant receives a \$250 buying credit on a Polypay ram and a one-year membership to the APSA. Helping to fund this year's grant, the APSA held an online fundraising auction and raised over \$3200 for the Starter Flock program. Don Hausser also graciously donated a ewe lamb this year, to help Jessica get her flock started. Congratulations again to Jessica on being selected the 2023 APSA Starter Flock grant winner!



2023 Sale Results

This year has once again seen a large number of sheep auctions featuring Polypays, from multi-breed sales, to an APSA sponsored sale, to private flock sales. The quantity and quality of animals offered has been something to behold. Buying and selling online has certainly become mainstream. I think it's safe to say that prices this year have been a bit soft compared to last year, with more than a few consignments not selling. Maybe that's due to softening lamb prices, or market saturation, drought, or a combination of those and other factors. Demand still seems to be fairly strong at the farm gate for quality rams and ewes.

Here are some results from the sales.

Midwest Stud Ram Sale, Sedalia, MO

1 ram sold for \$800

4 ewes averaged \$675

All these were consigned by L&K Sheep

Polypay Assn. Online Sale

8 rams sold for average of \$466

27 ewes averaged \$369

Top rams

Freking Polypay \$700

Express Polypay \$550

Top ewes

Big Prairie Polypay - 2 ewe lambs \$425/ea

NSIP Online Sale

19 rams averaged \$609

24 ewes averaged \$484

Top rams

Meinders Stock Farm \$1200

Freking Polypay \$1000

Hoogendoorn \$950

Top ewes

Diamond K \$2001

Shady Lane - 2 at \$750/ea

Big Prairie Polypay - 3 at \$651

Center of the Nation NSIP Sale, Spencer, IA

50 rams averaged \$1184

60 ewes averaged \$483

Top rams

Van Roekel \$6000

Hoogendoorn \$4400

Big Prairie \$4000

Refshaw \$3000

Top ewes

Taylor Made 3 ewes at \$950/ea

GEMS Update

Brett Pharo

As noted at the APSA annual membership meeting, the GEMS research project is well underway. GEMS is the handle attached to this project, and stands for Genetics, Environment, Management, and Socioeconomics. The focus of the research is using genetics to increase resilience and robustness in sheep.

Polypays were selected as one of four breeds to be involved because of our high participation in NSIP, which provides the necessary directly comparable genetic merit numbers for a variety of performance data. The other three breeds are Katahdin, Suffolk, and Rambouillet.

Out of this GEMS project, it is anticipated that we will get genetically-enhanced EBVs, (GEBVs) which should provide even more accuracy to genetic predictions, as well as possibly new EBVs for traits affecting longevity. GEBVs have been launched already for Katahdins.

At our annual meeting, someone asked when we could expect GEBVs for Polypays. The answer was that it only took a few months after the necessary research work for Katahdins to have GEBVs available. I admit that I wanted to answer that we producers needed to get on the ball and participate in submitting the necessary data. Polypay producers have a history of leading in matters of importance to the commercial sheep industry, particularly in the area of genetic quantification. We had what I would consider a disappointing number of Polypay flocks indicate a willingness to participate in this GEMS project. Even more disappointing is that as of the end of July, only 8 Polypay flocks had submitted any data to Dr. Lewis. The first step in this kind of project is to establish a solid reference population representative of the breed. That won't be as solid of a base if only 8 flocks submit data. I know there are at least a couple flocks that have said they have the data available, but haven't yet sent it in. I thank you for making the effort to collect the data, but please send it in so Dr. Lewis and team can use it. They will then let you know which animals they would like genotyped at their expense.

If you have questions or problems with your data, or if you'd like to jump in and participate, please contact Dr. Ron Lewis ASAP to get started. His email is: ron.lewis@unl.edu.



View from the Great Lakes State

Brett Pharo

It's been a very busy summer for us this year. Less so than it would have been if I hadn't made the decision a couple years ago to sell the hay equipment and start buying hay. That did open up the afternoons to attend softball and baseball games being played by our five grandchildren playing on a total of eight teams and basically 7 days a week. A couple times there were actually up to 7-8 tournament games in one day! There are few things I'd rather be doing.

In addition to that, there was a down and back sheep trip to central Missouri, a vacation touring up the west coast from LA to Portland, the annual pilgrimage to Spencer for the CNS, immediately followed by a week long family reunion with almost 30 people here doing much of the tourist stuff around this area, followed the next week by the county fair. And, of course, there's all the sheep stuff that needed to be done. I'm still trying to catch up.

The year has had some challenges, for sure. The producer owned 100+ year old cooperative we've sold wool through is done. We don't know where the wool will go next year. (Wool check was for \$0.00 this year anyway) We haven't had much in the way of moisture, which has made grazing challenging. We had to sell more ewes than the usual culls to cut down the grazing load, and sell all the feeders earlier than we would like. Marketing of ewe lambs was a bit slower than usual, too. I think this was only the second time in the last eight years that we haven't been sold out of ewe lambs before they were born. By early August we had them sold, and could have sold more, but it took longer this year.

It's been a fun year to watch and participate in sheep sales. There were some real bargains out there, for sure. And I certainly never thought I'd write a check for \$6000 for one ram (I'm a noted tightwad, and proud of it) - and I'm thankful I was being reimbursed for that by the ultimate buyer. I am looking forward to using him this fall and seeing what we get out of him next spring. Actually, I think my favorite part of sheep production is the planning for breeding matchups. I love the anticipation of what can be produced with various combinations. It takes some effort and time to collect, record, transfer and analyze data, but it's awesome to be able to use that genetic data in conjunction with physical appraisal to select replacements, purchase rams, and assign matings.

Here's to making good things happen.

