

The Feasibility of Establishing a Club Lamb Ewe Flock at Cal Poly

A Senior Project

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By

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Introduction

California is the second highest sheep producing state in the nation. Within the sheep production is the niche market of club lamb operations. Club lamb operations are typically run by families and friends, but colleges throughout the country have adopted their own club lamb operation. A study will be conducted to determine the feasibility of establishing a club lamb ewe flock at California Polytechnic University San Luis Obispo. Club lamb operations add value and interest in the university. Knowing first-hand how to run a sheep operation is crucial to the study's success. The author will examine facilities, nutrition, health, herd management, and student labor for the making of this operation. The purpose of this project is to increase student and alumni participation, incorporate the Cal Poly 'Learn By Doing' motto, and student recruitment. The key to this operation's success is help from donors and Cal Poly alum.

Years ago, Cal Poly had an operation similar to that of a Club Lamb ewe flock, which consisted of purebred Suffolk and Hampshire sheep. This program would raise, sell, and even show the lambs at local, state, and national shows. Cal Poly was known for having the best sheep program in the nation. However, through the years, the program has died off due to a decline in purebred sheep numbers. A newly established flock at Cal Poly will be used for teaching purposes, demonstrations, provide income, livestock judging and provide 4-H/FFA members with project lambs. Any lambs not sold as local projects will either be used for teaching purposes, livestock judging, replacements, or fed out and sold through the Meat Processing Center.

Establishing a Sheep Flock

In order to establish a successful sheep flock, it must consist of a breeding system, facilities and equipment, nutrition, health management, lambing schedule, supplementation, and proper finances (Fitch, 2015). To ensure a high quality flock, Cal Poly must select sheep based on phenotypical traits—reproductive rate, growth rate, soundness, and conformation. Stable and healthy livestock will lead to a steady and successful income. In order to meet these goals, a flock must perform rotational grazing, supplementation, and creep feeding. Rotational grazing can improve pasture conditions, increase forage use, or enhance livestock production (Keenan, 2000). Although sheep get a majority of their nutrition requirements from grazing, it is important to supplement them as well. Supplementation will improve the health of the ewe and her offspring as well. When the ewe is close to lambing, a lambing schedule will be established. In this lambing schedule, there will be feeding, rotating, and vaccinations. Some vaccinations that sheep require through their lifetime are CD&T, wormers, CORRID, Draxxin, and Excede.

Profits for this operation can be hindered by student labor hours, feed expenses, medical costs and administration costs. . Sheep operations make money by selling wool or selling the carcass to processors. However, club lambs are sold to be shown and exhibited, and eventually processed. Therefore, the profit of club lambs come from an initial sale price off the ranch or selling them to a meat processor. The current market price for lamb is \$1.40 per pound (Ahart, 2016).

Methodology

A quality and efficient facility to raise sheep is a multi-acre lot ideal for irrigating pastures and setting up barns. The facilities must also have equipment that is easy to move and handle sheep in. Sheep have wide-angle vision, and like to move uphill and into the wind (Fitch, 2015). The sheep unit at Cal Poly consists of 140-acres equipped with a shearing barn, wool packing machine, sorting chutes/treatment chutes, and a lambing barn. (Polyland, 2015). Therefore, making Cal Poly's sheep unit an optimum place to raise club lambs. The facility needs to be broken up into two lots. Lot A for the purpose of rotational grazing and feeding offspring for market, and Lot B for lambing, vaccinating, and supplementing ewes. Each lot needs to be equipped with automatic watering troughs, feeders, fencing, gathering pens, chutes, and barns.

The flock of club lamb ewes being established will consist of donated ewes from Cal Poly alumni, and local sheep breeders. It will be required of the donators to put a dollar amount on their ewe or buck so that Cal Poly knows the value of the animal being donated. Since the flock will be all donated ewes, the breeders are welcome to come look at the offspring at any time during production. These producers will form an advisory board for the operation to ensure success.

Students will be responsible for the care of the club lamb ewe flock. The operation can be turned into a club or enterprise to increase student recruitment and participation, and decrease student labor costs. Students will be responsible for feedings, health management, and breeding selection. Feeding this flock will consist of pasture grazing on wheat, creep feeding, and supplementation. The breeding system of this operation will be composed of ten ewes and one two rams to breed too, to increase diversity of the flock's genetics. Before breeding occurs, animals must be quarantined until proven healthy. With a gestation period of 147 days, ewes will breed in early summer for winter lambing. By lambing in the winter, lambs will be at the right age to be purchased by 4-H or FFA exhibitors to take to county fairs or other livestock shows.

Results and Conclusion

This senior project was turned into a business plan for the Animal Science Department to review and consider for an addition to the sheep unit. Unfortunately, it was not approved. However, the establishment of a club lamb ewe flock is still applicable and usable for other universities, clubs, or small breeders looking to start a new project. In order to successfully establish a club lamb ewe flock there needs to be the right facilities, staff (students), donors, and maximum profit.

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