

Lamb and Wool Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes April 13th, 2021

The annual Lamb and Wool Program Advisory Committee met on April 13, 2021, starting at 5:30 p.m. at Minnesota West Community and Technical College, Pipestone Campus. Committee members present included: Dr. Jeff Held, Randy Dombek, Rob Rule, Dr. Larry Goelz, Kevin Goeken, Jeremy Geske, Russ Gundermann, Wes Moser, Steve Schreier and Lila Schmidt attending remotely. Staff members present included: Ann Kolthoff and Philip Berg. Management Dean Paul Lanoue also attended remotely.

Philip provided a welcome and thanked the committee members for their commitment to the program. The instructors value the committees input into the program and their commitment to the success of the sheep industry. Committee members introduced themselves and provided one change in their life due to Covid 19.

Philip asked for any regional/national reports from committee members.

Jeremy Geske, member of the National Sheep Improvement Center indicated that this organization had more dollars available for research projects. Geske also the President for the Suffolk Association reported that based on their needs assessment they will be exploring ways to better connect to commercial sheep producers.

Steve Schreier, Past President for the National Lamb Feeders Association, reported that they will be conducting a tour for the young sheep producer group called the Trail Blazer Tour. He reported that this will take place in Texas for the 2021 year. A similar program was done in the Pipestone area a couple of years ago.

Rob Rule, Member of the Lamb Board, reported that the Lamb Board is working on 75% of their typical budget due to reduced lamb sales. Rule pointed out the Lamb board has reached out to Michigan State University and asked them to evaluate the environmental impact or carbon foot print of various types of sheep production.

Berg review committee members and indicated the term for Dombek, Rule, and Dr. Held was up. Berg asked if they would be willing to serve another term or if the committee had other ideas for committee members. Dombek, Rule, and Dr. Held all indicated they would be willing to serve an additional term. Committee members expressed that committee members should have a knowledge of the sheep industry in this region. The make-up of the committee has been 6 students/sheep producers and 6 Industry Leaders. Currently there is one opening for the committee. Moser wanted to make sure we included younger sheep producers. Several names were provided to the instructors for possible new committee members.

Minutes from the 2020 advisory committee meeting were emailed out and Philip reviewed changes made based on comments from the 2020 meeting.

A recess to the meeting was taken at 6:30 p.m. to eat Supper. Meeting began again at 7:24 p.m.

Dean Paul Lanoue provided a college update. Lanoue started with recognizing Ann Kolthoff as the new instructor. The college is very excited and happy to have Kolthoff as a Lamb and Wool instructor. Schmidt supported the college and thought Ann was a great addition to the program. Lanoue then commented on the challenges around Covid this last year. Program delivery looks different and more program delivery was transition to distance delivery via Zoom. Lanoue indicated MNWest enrollment was down 7.2%, but the college is still in a good financial position. Lanoue indicated that many students received Federal CARES funds. Fall enrollment is up. Dean Lanoue also indicated that the college is offering a Free as a Bird promotion that would provide 3 free credits for the first 1000 students during summer session. Tuition is unknown yet going into the Fall semester.

Dean Lanoue also reported that MNWest would be adding 6 FBM instructors from Ridgewater and another FBM instructor in the Sisseton SD area. Steve Schreier thanked Lanoue and the College for the support of agriculture. The last thing Lanoue provided was that 9-13% of total credits for MNWest are coming from management programs (FBM and L&W).

Philip reviewed the Lamb and Wool activities and credit sales for the 2020/2021 year. A program booklet was handed out to each member. Philip highlighted that enrollment for the member producer program was high, however outreach programs (Lambing time short course, Sheep Facility Tour and online courses) did not see the same enrollment increase. The majority of the decrease in outreach credits was due to the fact that the Sheep Facility Tour was canceled for 2021. 14 new program members were added and 10 program members did not reenroll. Several of the members who did not reenroll sold all their sheep while some indicated they could not afford. The average age of program members remained at 48 years old with a fairly even age distribution from 22 to 74 years old. Part of the growth in the program can be attributed to the implementation of new delivery methods to provide sheep management education to a larger audience.

Dr Held commented on the strong generational trend in the reported data as well as the low turnover rate. Moser was happy to see the number of operations going through generational transfer. Geske encouraged instructors to look for ways to encourage existing members to share with new members. Berg indicated that the Farm Focus group meetings were very successful for experienced producers to share information with new members and help new members network with others.

Ann Kolthoff discussed the Lambing Time Short Course. Kolthoff reported that the course was offered remotely via Zoom this year. Kolthoff prepared a video tour of two producers and a video with Dr. Wilking on processing lambs. The short course was held on Friday and Saturday, February 5th and 6th from 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. Kolthoff indicated a survey was taken with many positive responses. A survey summary was included in their handout. The instructors provided the following benefits and disadvantages of presenting this course virtually versus in person.

Benefits:

- Existing members could participate
- Could tour farms located farther away from Pipestone
- Program Efficiency

Disadvantages:

- No hands-on learning
- Hard to monitor
- Lower number of local students
- Less interaction

Instructors are looking at ways to engage participants. One way would be to use a survey tool to encourage participation. The committee asked if the Lamb and Wool program would be offered in person for the next year. Kevin Goeken suggested offering the course in person one year and the next online and rotate. Dr. Goelz pointed out that demographics of the students was different this year when offered remotely. Dr. Held commented that this program provided big returns for time spent. Dr. Held also suggested maybe looking at another time of year to offer the course to increase attendance. The committee commented that they did not want the instructors to spread themselves too thin and that they should look at sun setting some activities.

Berg asked for input program delivery. This year instructors provided multiple in person as well as virtual meetings. Most in person meeting were also delivered virtually through Zoom. Meetings began in November and continued until early April. A combination of Lamb and Wool Instructor presentations and guest speaker presentations were provided. Lamb and Wool instructors presented many current issue management practices while the guest speakers presented specific topics that were not as time sensitive. Dr. Goelz indicated that the mix looked good and encouraged instructors to continue to present the current management information. Typically the guest speakers present information later in the year to help producers look to the future. Berg asked committee to think about topics for guest speakers to talk about and share any ideas with the Lamb and Wool instructors.

Kolthoff reviewed program promotion. Ann indicated the Lamb and Wool program had a small advertising budget and targeted ads in 3 national publication (Shepherd Magazine, Sheep Industry News and Banner). Kolthoff presented examples of the ads. Kolthoff also pointed out that news releases were shared with many State, Regional and National organizations who then promote program offerings. A large email list is also used to promote programs.

The committee discussed some of the current lamb markets. Covid 19 has changed much of the historical trends in the lamb market. Currently, more lamb is being marketed in the retail store versus restaurant trade. Lighter lamb market has also shown strength over the last year. Goat market is also experiencing a high market. Pros and cons of goat educational programing were discussed.

Ann and Philip thanked the committee members for their input and contribution to the Lamb and Wool program.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:44 p.m.