

IS THAT RAM REALLY A “GOOD” DEAL?

By Melanie Barkley

Sheep producers may have already purchased a new ram or may still be looking for a new ram to breed the ewes this fall and winter. Many producers may be looking for a cheap ram, but is this really a good deal? Here are a few things to think about when purchasing that “good deal.”

Ratios will tell you how you can expect an animal to perform compared to others in the breed at a performance test. You can also use actual performance data such as birth weight, weaning weight and yearling weight to assist you in your decision. To make choosing a ram using performance data even more meaningful, you could buy rams from a producer who keeps performance records through NSIP (National Sheep Improvement Program). Don't forget, you might also ask producers at the purebred sales if they have performance data (especially birth, weaning or yearling weights) on the sheep they are offering for sale.

Let's look at an example of comparing buying a ram from your neighbor versus buying a ram with performance data. The ram from your neighbor is produced from “good” ewes, but you have no performance records to use to make a comparison. Chances are the ram from these ewes would perform on the average, so for this example we will use an average daily gain of .80 pounds per day. Your neighbor will sell you a ram for \$150.

Now let's consider a ram purchased from a performance tested ram sale. The fall ram lamb that you pick out had an average daily gain of 1.0 pounds during the time he was on test. His adjusted fat thickness was .21 inches and his adjusted loin eye average was 3.80 square inches. This tells you that the ram lamb has been gaining based on muscle and not fat. This ram would cost you \$500.

Which ram would be a better buy? Well, you plan to use this ram on 30 ewes that are nice average ewes. This ram would be used for two years and you can expect to wean 50 lambs each year. So, over two years you would have 100 lambs to either sell or keep as replacement animals. If you consider that the average weaning weight of those lambs from the ram with the performance information is 18 lbs. heavier than those produced by your neighbor's ram (90 days of age X .2 lbs/day difference in average daily gain), then you will have 1800 more pounds of lamb (100 lambs X 18 lbs.) to sell at 90 days of age over the two year period that you use the ram with the performance records. Depending on the area of the country where you live, this could equate to an increased income of \$1800 at \$1.00 a pound sale price to upwards of \$5400 for lambs sold at \$3.00 a pound. (For those of you with sticker shock, New Holland, PA prices near Christmas can go over \$3.00 a pound for 50 to 60 lb. lambs.) Even if you don't sell all those lambs, the ones you keep for replacements are valued more than replacements from the neighbor's ram.

Now, don't forget that when you go to sell the performance tested ram, he is likely to weigh at least 50 pounds more than the neighbor's ram. Then, you can add an extra amount of money to the additional value of the lambs for a ram that is worth \$.25 to \$.50 per pound, depending on your local market. For this comparison, we'll say the market was \$.30 a pound and thus the ram was worth \$15 more when he went to the market.

Now back to the comparison. The additional value of the performance tested ram would be \$1815 to \$5415. Subtract off the extra \$350 you paid for this ram and you have the potential to earn \$1,465 to \$5065 more over the two years that you own the ram. This value will continue to increase when you factor in the replacement ewes sired by the performance tested ram. They will be expected to contribute their genetics to

their lambs and will most likely wean heavier lambs than replacement ewes sired by the neighbor's ram.

The moral of this story is that you can make yourself more money by spending a little more to start with when buying a ram. It's just like anything you buy; you get what you pay for. The cheap truck that breaks down every other week will end up costing you a lot more than the more expensive truck in the long run.

For more information on the National Sheep Improvement Program, you can visit their website at <http://www.nsip.org>. You can also contact Alan Culham who handles the Dorset NSIP program at 514.521.4870 or on the web at <http://www.members.aol.com/dornsip/dornsip.htm>.

For more information on selecting livestock or evaluating performance data, contact the Penn State Cooperative Extension Office in Bedford County at 120 W. John Street, Suite 2 in Bedford or call at (814) 623-4800.

RAM TESTS AROUND THE COUNTRY

The sheep industry is fortunate to have several ram tests located around the country. Most of them are affiliated with agricultural universities. There are a couple of ram tests that focus on wool quality but following is a list of ram tests stations that are open to all breeds of sheep:

* Pennsylvania Ram Test, Pennsylvania Furnace, PA in cooperation with the Penn Dept of Agriculture. Contact: Glenn Eberly, Director, (814)238-2527, e-mail: geberly@state.pa.us

*Virginia Ram Test, Steeles Tavern, VA in cooperation with Virginia Tech University. Contact: Scott Grenier (540)231-9163, e-mail: sgrenier@vt.edu

*Western Illinois University Ram Test, Macomb, IL. Contact: John Carlson, (309)298-1611, e-mail: jp_carlson@wiu.edu, web: wiu.edu/ramtest

*Wisconsin Ram Test, Janesville, WI held in cooperation with University of Wisconsin/Madison. Contact: Nils Nelson (608)876-6928, web: wisbc.com/ramtest

*Dakota Ram Test, Hettinger, ND held in cooperation with North Dakota State University. Contact: Chris Schauer, Director, (701)567-4323

*Oklahoma State Sheep Improvement Ram Test, Stillwater, OK held in cooperation with Oklahoma State University. Contact: Dr. Gerald Fitch (405)744-6065, e-mail: jerryfitch@okstate.edu

*Colorado Ram Test, Fort Collins, CO held in cooperation with Colorado State University. Contact: Steve LeValley (970)491-1321

These ram tests also sponsor sales where one can purchase the rams tested and some even have invitational ewe sales. Many of these sales also feature some type of educational sheep programs held sale day. Some of these ram tests are closed to consignors from those states but many are open to breeders from any state. You will need to contact them directly to find out entry requirements.

2007 PENNSYLVANIA RAM TESTS RESULTS

The Pennsylvania Ram Test Sale was held August 4, 2007 at the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Livestock Evaluation Center in Pennsylvania Furnace, PA. The Dorset breed had a total of 23 rams sold out of the 34 Dorsets tested. That was the largest number of rams tested for any breed.

Roger Bowman of Lenhartsville, PA had the ram testing with the highest Avg Daily Gain at 1.22 and ADG Ratio at 1.29 in the Junior Dorset division. A ram from Riverwood Farms, Powell OH was the highest indexing ram in the Senior Dorset division. The ram had a ADG of 1.05 and had an ADG Ratio of 128. Both of these rams also sold very well

as the Bowman ram topped his class as he sold for \$600 to Kimberly R. Sutton. The Riverwood entry sold for \$575 to Jason Timothy.

There were some other high selling rams. Hollystone Farm, Paoli, PA sold a senior ram to John Jacob Waltz for \$1100 and Penn State University sold a senior ram to The Holz Family for \$1300. In the junior class K-Bar K, Petersburg, PA sold a ram to SUNY-Cobleskill for \$525 and John Stewart, Hookstown, PA sold a ram to Barry Lawery & Janna Hearn for \$400. The ten senior Dorset rams averaged \$543 and the 13 Junior Dorset rams sold for an average of \$331.

This sale also has an invitational ewe sale. The Dorset breed had 17 ewes offered for sale, again the largest numbers offered for any breed. Dr. & Mrs. Robert Herr, Narvon sold a pair of ewe lambs to Paul & Jackie Rapp for \$275 each and the Kenneth Staver Family sold a ewe lamb to the Rapps at the same price. The average on the Dorset ewes sold was \$202.

