

# **DORSET COMMERCIAL** **CONNECTION**

## **\$4.00 per Bushel Corn: Opportunity or Liability**

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We've all been feeling the brunt of the energy crisis with the increasing costs of fuel. As livestock producers we are also seeing the results of a corn market being directed into making ethanol. Corn prices are reaching \$4.00 a bushel already and may continue to rise even higher than that in some areas of the country. For some livestock producers this could be a wonderful opportunity while for others it will become a great liability.

The greatest opportunity for some sheep producers will come from the fact that most sheep can easily be finished for market on a grass based ration. In the past, 70 to 80% of the costs associated with raising sheep came from the feeding program. In a grass finished operation we can reduce these costs to as low as 50% or more. With the dramatic increases in grain costs, these feed cost savings will become even more pronounced for an operation utilizing mostly pasture and other forages.

We can also use advertising grass finished lambs to our advantage because the public assigns an increased value to "greener" products which include terms such as grass-fed, natural, organic, hormone or antibiotic free, free range and fresh. Wendy Pinkerton and Sharlet Teigen from Demeter Solutions, a communications in marketing firm, estimate about 17% of the United States population follows principles of Lohas (lifestyles for health and sustainability), with this percentage rising annually. Any sheep producer living near a metropolitan area would certainly have an opportunity to market lambs for a price above the average market value by advertising grass fed lambs.

The dramatic increase in grain prices is a great liability for any producer who relies on large amounts of grain to either grow out lambs or maintain the body condition of their ewe flock. Producers can certainly sacrifice some growth in exchange for the cost savings of feeding lower cost forages as opposed to high priced grain. However, this may not be an option for producers who either require the fast growth rates for marketing their sheep or for producers who raise sheep that do not have the ability to perform at a high level on an all forage or limited grain ration. Therefore, high grain prices will have these producers searching for other options besides corn or they may need to take a closer look at their breeding program and analyze what type of sheep they can raise most profitably.

Corn distillers grains that are produced by the ethanol industry will certainly be one option to substitute for corn. These grains are what are left after the ethyl alcohol has been removed after the yeast fermentation process. These

grains are dried and then blended with the condensed distillers solubles syrup to make handling easier and to increase the shelf life. The energy value of the dried distillers grains and solubles (DDGS) ranges from equal to slightly higher than corn. The protein value of the DDGS runs about 24 to 32% on a dry matter basis. It can be used to add protein and energy to both lamb and ewe rations.

Dr. Dan Morrical, Sheep Extension Specialist at Iowa State University, notes that copper levels in DDGS can vary depending on the amount of copper used in the still. "Values range from 6 ppm in wet distillers to 83 ppm in the condensed distillers solubles." He suggests watching copper levels over time as copper will accumulate in the liver. Adding molybdenum to the feed will help to decrease copper absorption. In addition, high levels of sulfur in the DDGS will decrease copper absorption.

The National Corn Growers Association recommends using no more than 10% of DDGS in lamb finishing rations. Higher levels of DDGS can reduce both intake and potential performance. Another consideration is to balance the ration for the calcium to phosphorus ratio to prevent problems with urinary calculi. DDGS are high in phosphorus and low calcium.

DDGS work best in ewe rations where the forage quality is low. DDGS can be especially useful for ewes nursing lambs on a low quality forage diet. More information on feeding corn distillers grains can be found at [www.ncga.com](http://www.ncga.com) or by contacting the National Corn Growers Association at 636-733-9004.

Regardless of the type of sheep operation, you are likely to be affected by the increased costs of grain to some extent either now or in the near future. Evaluate grains based on the cost per pound of energy or cost of pound of protein to help you make decisions on how to formulate a lower cost ration.

### **2006 VIRGINIA RAM LAMB PERFORMANCE TEST SALES RESULTS**

The 2006 Virginia Ram Lamb Performance Test Sale was held last August 26, 2006 at the test facility at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA. The Dorset breed had the second largest number of rams on test. 14 Dorset Fall or Winter born ram lambs were offered for sale. Following are the sales results on the 9 head that sold:

#### **\*Fall Ram Lambs:**

- Lot 5 from Virginia Tech, VA to Cloverdale Farm, VA for \$210
- Lot 7 from Virginia Tech, VA to Univ. of Delaware, DE for \$300
- Lot 8 from David Shifflett, VA to Cloverdale Farm VA for \$220
- Lot 10 from Lake View Farm, VA to Mike Mawhinney, PA for \$510

#### **\*Winter Ram Lambs:**

- Lot 26 from Virginia Tech, VA to NC State Univ., NC for \$480
- Lot 27 from Virginia Tech, VA to Gayle Marcum, VA for \$210
- Lot 29 from Gary Hornbaker, VA to Mark & Donna Johnson, VA for \$520
- Lot 30 from Gary Hornbaker, VA to Swecker Dorsets, VA for \$270
- Lot 33 Long & Allen Dorsets, VA to Gerald Cooperman, VA for \$210

### **PENNSYLVANIA RAM TEST ANNOUNCE 2007 TEST PROGRAM**

The 2007 Pennsylvania Ram Test in Pennsylvania Furnace, PA will be accepting nominations up until March 15, 2007. Cost of nomination is \$20.00. All rams must be a purebred registered animal. There are categories for fall and spring born rams. Preference is given to Pennsylvania breeders first and then to out of state breeders. There are requirements for entry including a minimum 50-day weight ratio, meeting acceptable standards for conformation, disease free with accompanying health papers. Qualified rams that make it to the end of the test period will be offered for sale at the performance ram test sale August 4 and will include an invitational ewe sale. For more information please feel free to contact:

Penn. Livestock Evaluation Center  
Telephone: 814-238-2527  
email: [geberly@state.pa.us](mailto:geberly@state.pa.us)

### **ILLINOIS ANNOUNCES 2007 TEST PROGRAM DATES**

The 2007 Illinois Central Ram Test will once again be held at the Western Illinois University Facility in Macomb, IL. They run a 84-day test and a 63-day test. Rams must be delivered to the facility March 17<sup>th</sup> for the 84-day test and April 7<sup>th</sup> for the 63-day test. The sale will be held July 7<sup>th</sup>. Tests are for spring born lambs only. This ram test facility has the latest technology including a Feed Intake Recording Equipment system that allows daily weighing of sheep and feed intake. For more information on this test contact:

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