

SMALL RUMINANT TALK

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Central Region

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Welcome to Small Ruminant Talk

Ashley Edwards, PhD, Assistant Extension Agent and Coordinator, LSU AgCenter

This year has pushed many of us out of our comfort zones in more ways than we can count. As we all know, the agriculture industries were faced with significant challenges, particularly in our markets. Of course, livestock producers and farmers around the world continued their work. As a nation we were compelled to reach out to each other through all forms of media to keep ourselves and each other safe. Stopping myself from shaking someone's hand is odd for me, as I am sure it is for so many of you. Growing up in a large family full of handshakes and hugs made these actions natural. Now I am learning to reach out, meet, and engage with people in my professional and personal life through various forms of media.

At the LSU AgCenter, we strive to best serve producers and industry professionals throughout the state in our programs and on all media platforms. The authors you will be hearing from in this newsletter wanted to bring you, Louisiana's sheep and goat producers, more information. We hope this quarterly newsletter helps improve management in your flocks and herds by bringing you content from current research and proven management practices. We have also planned content for our youth producers and 4-H and FFA exhibitors. Throughout each issue you will see articles from livestock and forage extension agents and specialists, 4-H agents, and veterinarians on a variety of topics. We will be producing a Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer issue in October, January, April, and July, respectively. Your feedback is always vital to the content and programs we provide. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any content ideas or questions you have. My contact information is listed on the last page.



Thank you again for joining us in our first issue of Small Ruminant Talk. I hope that the next few months and holiday season bring you time with your family and friends.

Disaster Readiness for Goat and Sheep Producers

Christine B. Navarre, DVM, MS, DACVIM, Extension Veterinarian, LSU AgCenter, School of Animal Sciences

Advanced planning can help goat and sheep producers minimize the loss of animal lives and the health problems associated with all disasters. Because of the vulnerability of Louisiana to hurricanes and their potential to cause widespread damage due to high winds and flooding, hurricane preparedness is essential. And much of the disaster preparation for hurricanes will also help prepare for other disasters, such as fire, hazardous material spills, animal disease outbreaks, etc. It must be stressed that although help may be available from many sources following a disaster, producers themselves are ultimately responsible for the welfare of their animals and should prepare accordingly.

Well in advance of a potential disaster situation, producers should evaluate their herd/flock health programs with their veterinarian. Goats and sheep that undergo evacuation either before or after a disaster will be stressed and are likely to be commingled with other animals. Biosecurity will be breached, which makes increasing immunity against disease imperative. Pneumonia and abortions are anticipated problems and can be minimized with proper nutrition and vaccination.

Animal identification is also important. If goats or sheep get evacuated and commingled, or escape and are later captured, it's essential to be able to identify the herd/flock of origin through tags or tattoos. Many animals look alike, and plain numbered dangle tags and tattoos can be duplicated. So producers should identify the farm or ranch on the dangle tag or tattoo or use electronic identification that is unique to each individual animal. Pictures and/or videos of animals may also help identify them later.

In situations such as hurricanes where advanced warning is given, health papers should be provided by a veterinarian if animals are to be evacuated, particularly if traveling across state lines. In some situations it may not be possible to evacuate or rescue all animals, so producers should prioritize animals so their most valuable stock gets attention first. Copies of herd/flock records, proof of ownership and registration papers should be stored in a safe place.

Because of their relatively small size compared to cattle and horses, mass evacuation of goats and sheep is possible if plans are made weeks in advance of a potential disaster. Producers should partner with other farms to provide trucking and also evacuation space so public holding areas can be used for rescued animals. Biosecurity issues (potential for disease transmission between herds/flocks) should be discussed when making these arrangements. Producers should have safe, efficient penning and loading facilities ready in advance. Livestock trailers should be inspected to make sure they are ready for hauling long distances. If flooding or high winds are expected and animals cannot be evacuated, they should be left in large open pastures and not put in barns.

Producers should coordinate plans with other local agriculture related groups such as Extension Services, USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Services and Farm Service Agencies, Farm Bureau, local producer associations, livestock auction markets, feed stores, etc. Different tasks such as livestock hauling; feed, fuel and generator acquisition and distribution; and animal evacuation, rescue and treatment should be assigned to individuals or groups in advance. Primary and contingent holding areas for evacuated and/or rescued animals as well as staging areas for feed and fuel distribution should be identified in advance. Special evacuation routes for livestock should be considered so loaded trucks and trailers can keep moving to avoid heat stress in the animals. Early evacuation is necessary as roads may be closed to trailer and towing traffic as a storm approaches.

In large-scale disasters involving high numbers of animals, providing food and fresh water is the first priority. Although difficult in many situations, efforts should be made to have an emergency supply of feed and water stored in a safe place. Adult goats and sheep need 1-2 gallons of water per head per day. Storage tanks previously holding chemicals should not be used to store water. If wells depend on electricity to pump water, hand pumps or generators should be available in case of electrical outages. Producers should make their local extension office aware in advance of the numbers of animals and their locations. This will help ensure that your animals are included in immediate feed distributions if available. Otherwise, feed may not be distributed until this information can be verified, which puts the animals at risk.

Animals that have been standing in water for prolonged periods of time may have skin infections and may be susceptible to tetanus. Dehydration and digestive upsets may occur if animals have been drinking water with high salinity. Damage to chemical storage buildings and fences may allow livestock access to toxic chemicals or plants. Severely injured or sick animals may require veterinary treatment or euthanasia. If animals do need treatment, working facilities should be inspected before use as they may have been damaged. Access to portable working facilities should be arranged in advance. Ropes, halters and wire cutters should also be collected in advance and stored in a safe place. Plastic/nylon halters and ropes should be avoided in disasters involving fire, as they may melt on the animal and cause injury. With the help of a veterinarian, an emergency supply of medications and supplies can be readied in advance.

Besides portable working facilities and corrals, other equipment needs should be arranged. Tractors and forklifts to move feed and supplies, trucks and trailers for hauling livestock, and feed and water troughs may be needed. Following widespread flooding, airboats and cowboys on horseback may be able to reach areas where livestock are stranded. Local residents familiar with the area should be dedicated in advance to acting as guides for out-of-town volunteers.

There is no way to prepare for every situation that arises in a disaster. However, by working closely with other producers and agricultural leaders, goat and sheep producers can lessen the impact of a disaster on their operation.

Disaster Readiness Checklist:

- Herd/flock health and vaccinations up-to-date
- Animal identification
- Health papers
- Prioritize herd
- Records stored in safe location
- Evacuation plan
- Cash available for emergency purchases (credit cards may not work if power/phone service is interrupted or lines are jammed)
- Food and water for 1-2 weeks.
- Emergency equipment and first aid supplies stored
- Partner with other producers/farms
- Coordinate plans with other local agricultural groups



Starting a Goat Dairy

Dr. Gary M. Hay, Dairy and Livestock Specialist, Southeast Region, LSU AgCenter

Raising goats has become an enjoyable pastime for many people in Louisiana. The 4-H Goat project has become one of the fastest growing livestock projects at 4-H and youth shows throughout the state. A quick check on Facebook shows the Louisiana Dairy Goat Association with over 1,100 members on their Facebook page! For anyone interested in raising livestock, goats can be an inexpensive and fun enterprise.

Raising goats offers a less expensive alternative to raising cattle both as a 4-H project and as a livestock enterprise. Goats require less acreage, less housing and working facilities and lower feed costs than cattle. Startup costs for goats can also be a lot less expensive than for cattle. Goats tend to be energetic and entertaining yet easy to handle and very tolerant of human interaction. Goats are especially attractive for younger 4-H members not only for the lower initial investment but also because they can be much easier and safer to handle than larger animals such as cattle.

Goats are raised for the production of either meat or milk and dairy products such as cheese, or both. Although there are numerous breeds of goats, many breeds have been created to optimize one or both of these functions. For example, while all goats produce milk, some goat breeds produce more milk than other breeds. These breeds are called dairy breeds or dairy goats.

There are several commercial goat dairies in Louisiana. These are enterprises that normally milk several goats and sell their products (either bottled goat milk and/or goat cheese) as a commercial or for-profit enterprise. These enterprises usually rely on dairy goat breeds to produce enough milk to make the cost of milking the goats and manufacturing dairy

goat products economically feasible. For more information concerning dairy goat breeds on the web, a good place to start is the American Dairy Goat Association website at: <http://adga.org/breed-standards/>.

For anyone interested in starting a commercial dairy goat enterprise in Louisiana or in other words selling goat milk and/or goat cheese, the first step is to be aware of the state and federal regulations governing the sale of ANY dairy products either within Louisiana or across state lines. This includes milk from cows, goats or any other lactating species. Under federal law, the interstate sale of milk and dairy products are regulated by the Federal Pasteurized Milk Ordinance or PMO. The PMO is a set of regulations agreed upon by the US Food and Drug Administration and the public health agencies from all US states and territories for the safe production, processing and distribution of milk and dairy products. The US Food and Drug Administration is the primary federal agency responsible for regulating public health and safety of dairy products. In order to sell dairy products, the production and processing of milk and dairy products MUST meet the minimum standards stated in the federal PMO.

The Louisiana Legislature has adopted the standards in the federal PMO as the minimum standards for selling milk and dairy products WITHIN the state, known as intrastate commerce. All milk and dairy products produced and sold within the state must meet the standards stated in the PMO. The Louisiana state agency responsible for regulating milk and dairy products produced and sold within the state is the Milk and Dairy Unit, Department of Health and Hospitals.

The Milk and Dairy Unit is responsible for issuing permits allowing the sale of ALL dairy products (including products made from goat's milk); assisting producers in designing facilities for safely producing and processing milk; making routine (monthly) inspections of facilities to ensure producers are maintaining and operating their facilities in a manner to protect public health; procure routine milk samples and conduct laboratory tests on milk and dairy products to ensure ALL dairy products sold in Louisiana meet PMO standards to protect public health; and to approve product labeling of ALL dairy products to meet PMO standards for product content as well as location and date of manufacture. Anyone selling milk or dairy products in Louisiana (even if it is from one goat) must comply with standards and regulations stated in the PMO and enforced by the Milk and Dairy Unit.

The purpose of the PMO and the function of the Milk and Dairy Unit is to ensure public health and safety. The Milk and Dairy Unit does not regulate commerce or enforce commerce laws. This means the Milk and Dairy Unit does not regulate what type of dairy products can be sold (milk, cheese, butter, frozen products, etc.); where products can be sold; or how products are priced.

Milk and dairy products (from cows or goats) are highly nutritious and delicious. However, milk is highly perishable and can easily be contaminated or adulterated. Milk can become contaminated with numerous types of pathogenic bacteria from unhealthy animals or through contamination by poor handling techniques such as improper milking procedures and/or use of improperly cleaned and sanitized equipment such as buckets, etc. Proper milking procedures, properly cleaned and sanitized equipment and adequate cooling facilities and cooling procedures are all critical to prevent potential threats to public health. Milk can also be adulterated by improper use of antibiotics to treat sick animals, improper or illegal pesticide use and improper use of cleaning and sanitizing agents. The rules and regulations in place through the PMO and enforced by the Milk and Dairy Unit are critical to ensure ALL dairy producers market clean, safe products.

Here are a few of the major regulations outlined in the PMO.

1. Milk cannot be produced and processed in the same facility without physical separation. You cannot milk your goats and process the milk in the milking facility. The facility where the goats are milked must be separated by a physical wall. Both facilities may be housed under one roof but there must be a physical separation from the animals and the processing facility.
2. ALL milk and dairy products (including goat's milk and goat cheese) must be pasteurized before being sold to the public. Pasteurization involves heating milk to a specified temperature for a specified length of time to kill pathogenic bacteria. It is illegal and dangerous to public health to sell raw, unpasteurized dairy products.
3. Milk and dairy products sold in Louisiana must be completely free of antibiotics, pesticides and other organic chemicals. The tolerance level for antibiotics in milk is ZERO.

4. ALL milk and dairy products sold in Louisiana MUST have a label approved by the Milk and Dairy Unit. This regulation ensures consumers are purchasing products that are safe and can be traced to a specific date, location and producer.

The FIRST STEP to starting a goat dairy in Louisiana is to contact the Milk and Dairy Unit, Department of Health and Hospitals to make sure your enterprise meets all public health regulations stated in the PMO. The Milk and Dairy Unit will assist you in designing milking and processing facilities and assist you in designing marketing labels for your products and help you understand any and all requirements to meet public health standards. The Milk and Dairy Unit is headquartered in Amite, Louisiana and can be contacted at **985-748-2010**. For more information on milking, feeding and managing dairy goats contact the LSU AgCenter through your local parish extension office.

The Estrous Cycle and Seasonality in Sheep and Goats

Ashley Edwards, PhD, Assistant Extension Agent and Coordinator, LSU AgCenter

Defining the Estrous Cycle

The estrous cycle is commonly defined as the series of physiological events occurring between periods of estrus, where estrus is the time of sexual receptivity or heat¹. Females that exhibit estrus or cycle multiple times within a given period are considered polyestrous species. Some females will cycle year-round, whereas others, such as sheep and goats, exhibit estrus during a specific season. In sheep and goats, peak sexual activity occurs during fall months, making them a seasonally polyestrous species.

Length of the estrous cycle in sheep is an average of 17 days but can vary between 14 and 19 days. Average duration of estrus is 24 to 36 hours, with ovulation occurring towards the end of estrus or approximately 24 hours after the onset of estrus. In goats, length of the estrous cycle is an average of 21 days but can vary between 18 and 24 days. Average duration of estrus is 36 hours. However, the estrus stage may last 12 to 48 hours, depending on breed and environmental factors such as presence of a buck and season. Ovulation tends to occur towards the end of estrus, although it may occur anywhere from 9 to 72 hours after estrus begins.

Communication between Hormones

Communication between the brain and reproductive tract is established by many hormones. Some of the primary reproductive hormones responsible for events of the estrous cycle are:

- Gonadotropin releasing hormone (GnRH) produced by the hypothalamus in the brain. Its main function is to stimulate the production of luteinizing hormone (LH) and follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) from the anterior pituitary.
- Luteinizing hormone (LH) produced by the anterior pituitary, within the brain, in response to GnRH. The two primary functions of LH are to (1) promote formation of a corpus luteum on the ovary and (2) stimulate ovulation.
- Follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) produced by the anterior pituitary, within the brain, in response to GnRH. Like its name states, the main function of FSH is to stimulate growth of follicles on the ovaries. The largest, dominant follicle is referred to as a Graafian follicle and will be the follicle that ovulates. Goats may have more than one follicle mature into a Graafian follicle, therefore causing multiple ovulations for the development of twins, triplets, etc.
- Estrogen (E₂) produced by follicles on the ovaries. As a follicle grows, it produces greater amounts of estrogen. The dominant follicle, called a Graafian follicle, produces the most estrogen and ends up being the follicle that ovulates. Estrogen also stimulates heat or sexual receptivity during estrus.
- Progesterone (P₄) produced by the corpus luteum on the ovary. After ovulation, the follicle develops into a corpus luteum in response to LH. The corpus luteum will produce progesterone for most of the estrous cycle. Progesterone has many functions, but it primarily works to support pregnancy (think pro-gestation) when conception occurs. Progesterone also works to suppress the production of GnRH, LH, FSH and estrogen through negative feedback mechanisms.
- Prostaglandin (PG or PGF_{2α}) produced by the uterus when pregnancy does not occur. It works to destroy the corpus luteum and stop production of progesterone. This allows follicles to develop again and estrogen production to increase. Consequently, if prostaglandin is administered during pregnancy, it can cause abortion.

Understanding Seasonality

In seasonally polyestrous species, the hormone melatonin regulates the production of GnRH. Goats and sheep, as well as deer, are referred to as short day breeders because they exhibit peak sexual activity throughout the fall months. Longer nights in the fall and winter months stimulate increased melatonin production from the pineal gland in the brain. Melatonin then stimulates an increase in GnRH from the hypothalamus to initiate the course of hormones involved in the estrous cycle.

When daylight begins to increase and nights become shorter, less melatonin is produced. A decrease in melatonin corresponds with a decrease in GnRH. Consequently, estrous cycles become irregular or cease altogether until fall occurs again. Animals lacking or not exhibiting regular periods of estrus are said to be in a period of anestrus. More specifically, since most sheep and goats do not exhibit signs of sexual receptivity during the spring and summer months, they are experiencing a period of seasonal anestrus. It should be noted that some breeds of sheep do tend to exhibit estrus

regularly throughout the year. This is particularly common in hair breeds, such as the Dorper, in tropical and subtropical climates.



Summary

An understanding of the hormones and physiological processes involved in the estrous cycle of sheep and goats can improve herd management through setting the breeding season at the most opportune time. It also gives a foundation for the use of an appropriate estrus synchronization protocol for timing of artificial insemination or breeding by natural service. All of these can serve to decrease labor input, improve management efficiency and increase profit in a flock or herd.

References

¹Senger, P. L. *Pathways to Pregnancy & Parturition*. Edited by P. L. Senger. 3rd ed.: Current Conceptions, Inc., 2015.

Preparing Small Ruminants for Breeding Season

Rodney Johnson, Livestock Agent, Central Region, and Small Ruminant Program Coordinator, LSU AgCenter

The relationship between nutrition and reproduction is a topic of increasing importance and concern among producers. The interaction between nutrition and reproduction has long been known to have important implications for the reproductive performance. Energy and protein are the major nutrients required in the greatest amounts and should be in the utmost importance to optimize reproduction.

The nutritional status of the animals at breeding is the primary factor that influences reproductive performance. Based on a Body Condition Score (BCS) scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very thin and 5 being fat, females should enter the breeding season around a 3.5 body condition score. The practice of flushing is one method to help females that are below the target BCS of 3.5 to gain weight.

Flushing is the supplementing breeding age females with additional energy prior to breeding season. Most producers flush by using 0.5 to 1 pound of grain per animal per day. The most common grain that is used is corn. Flushing should begin approximately 3 weeks prior to breeding season and continue 2-3 weeks into breeding season. The objective of flushing is to boost ovulation rates, increase the number of females that exhibit estrus, and increase conception rates. Flushing can increase kidding rates by 15-20%.

The age and BCS of the female will affect the response of flushing. Mature females show a better response, as well as those with an BCS of less than 3.

Bucks need to be in good body condition score with a BCS of 4 before breeding season. It is best to evaluate the BCS three months prior to breeding season. Mature bucks can obtain most of their nutrition from pasture if adequate pasture is provided. Yearling and 2-year-old bucks have greater nutritional requirements since they are still growing. 0.5 to 1 pound of corn or sweet feed can be fed to bucks if needed.

Do not feed bucks more than 1.5% of body weight for a long period of time because it will increase chances of getting urinary calculi. Free choice pasture or hay and adequate water supply is also necessary to prevent urinary calculi.

Example of a Body Condition Score of 3

(Photo courtesy of eXtension.gov and Detweiler, G., T. Gipson, R. C. Merkel, A. Goetsch, and T. Sahlu. 2008. Body Condition Scores in Goats. Pages 127-133 in Proc. 23rd Ann. Goat Field Day, Langston University, Langston, OK.)



Winter Annual Forages for Small Ruminant Producers

Ed Twidwell, PhD, Extension Specialist, LSU AgCenter

Many sheep and goat producers consider winter annual forages to be a vital component of their overall forage program. Pastures of winter annuals such as ryegrass, small grains, and clovers can provide high quality forage at a time when summer grasses are dormant. The forage quality of these pastures makes them highly desirable for wintering small ruminant species. Planting a winter pasture may be the most economical means of wintering your livestock.



Productive winter pastures actually begin prior to planting. Field selection, soil testing, site preparation, and selection of the crops and varieties best suited for your soils and your needs, well in advance of planting time, can help avoid many of the errors of last-minute decision making. Soil testing is especially critical as it can help you avoid spending excess money on lime and fertilizer that aren't needed.

Annual ryegrass is the most important winter annual grazing crop in Louisiana. Some of the advantages of annual ryegrass include its high yielding ability, ease of establishment, high forage quality and tendency to form a dense sod. Its peak growth period is in the spring, but it can provide late-fall growth if planted early. There are many commercial varieties of annual ryegrass available.

Small grain crops include oats, wheat and cereal rye. Oats has the ability to provide the most available grazing during the fall months. Oats, however, are the least cold tolerant of the small grain species. There are several excellent oat varieties available for forage, including RAM LA 99016. Wheat and cereal rye have excellent cold tolerance. Cereal rye provides the least spring grazing, as it matures in early to mid-April.

Many winter annual clovers grow well with winter annual grasses. The need to improve forage quality and reduce nitrogen fertilizer costs can make the winter annual legume-grass mixtures ideal for many situations. The most common annual clovers that best fit these mixtures are crimson, arrowleaf, berseem and ball. Red clover is another species that can be used. It is classified as a reseeding annual or a biennial species. It extends spring production because it grows later into the spring than most other annual clovers. The only perennial clover species available for planting is white clover. Similar to red clover, it can produce growth into the late-spring to early summer months. There are several excellent varieties available including Regalgraze, Pinnacle, Durana, Neches and Renovation.

Some producers may desire to have their winter pasture available for grazing prior to January 1. For these producers, planting into a prepared seedbed in late September or early October provides the best opportunity for early grazing. With this type of winter pasture, small grains (wheat, rye or oats) plus ryegrass is a popular mixture. This type of pasture is expensive due to the seedbed preparation in addition to seed, fertilizer, etc. Also, early plantings can be devastated or destroyed by fall armyworms. Infestations of fall armyworms in perennial warm-season pastures have been reported in many portions of the state this summer, so if you seed ryegrass into a prepared seedbed this fall, be on the lookout for this insect. Oats can be planted in early September, but rye, ryegrass, and wheat should not be planted until after September 20.

Overseeding winter annuals on summer grass sod is generally one of the least expensive types of pasture to produce, but does not provide much fall or early winter grazing. Ryegrass is commonly planted and is very productive if properly fertilized. Small grains are sometimes included but much of their potential early growth is missed because the overseeding must be delayed until the summer grass becomes dormant, usually in mid-to-late October. Clovers are sometimes included and can make a contribution due to their nitrogen-fixing ability and high forage quality. Their contribution will be reduced, however, if high nitrogen rates are used in the spring. More producers are beginning to use no-till drills to overseed their ryegrass. This works well as those drills do an excellent job of placing the seed at the proper depth in the soil.

After you have decided which type of winter pasture program would best fit your operation, you will need to select one or more fields for planting. Areas with poor drainage should be avoided since the winter and spring months are frequently wet. The fields you select should have a medium or higher level of fertility and a satisfactory pH. Most grasses tolerate a pH as low as 5.5, but most clovers generally do better if the pH is between 6.0 and 7.0. Any needed lime should be applied well in advance of planting for maximum benefits. There is a good chance that winter pastures may be a vital part of your livestock operation this winter. If you have questions regarding winter pastures, contact your local Extension agent.

Caseous Lymphadenitis

Sallye Fontenot, Assistant Extension Agent, Rapides Parish, LSU AgCenter

Caseous lymphadenitis (CL) is a highly contagious disease that is caused by a bacteria. The bacteria must penetrate the skin or mucous membranes to establish an infection. Most infections occur thru skin injury such as shearing, tagging, docking, castration, or trauma. Once in the body the bacteria move to lymph nodes and occasionally other organs.

The bacteria is very stable in the environment and can live up to 8 months in soil and up to 2 months in bedding. The incubation period is 1-3 months (time of exposure to the bacteria until clinical signs appear). The primary clinical signs are abscessed lymph nodes mainly under the jaw, shoulder, and rear legs. Any small ruminant with swollen lymph nodes should be handled like it is CL until proven otherwise. Relapse is very common and can occur months later. When the organs are affected with the bacteria, the most common signs are chronic weight loss and ill thriftiness, one may also see chronic coughing with nasal discharge, difficult breathing if the infection is in the lungs. The only definitive diagnosis is to culture the organism.

The treatment for caseous lymphadenitis is supportive care and antimicrobial treatment. The use of antimicrobials is extra label use, so it is best to consult with your veterinarian. If abscesses are lanced and drained it should be flushed out with a solution of diluted iodine and animal isolated in an area that can be disinfected. The purulent material should be collected and properly disposed to avoid infecting another animal in the herd. Due to chronicity of the disease and problems to eliminate the organism, it is very hard to eliminate the disease from the herd. The best way to prevent CL from the herd is thru biosecurity, cull diseased animal. Disinfection of all equipment and removal of all hazards in environment that could potentially injure skin. Prepurchase exams on all new animals for lesions, serological testing and quarantine all new animals.

A 4-H Perspective with Ali Fontenot

Hannah Devall, Associate Extension Agent, St. Martin Parish 4-H, LSU AgCenter

Fall is in the air and with the hopeful change in temperature, comes a new season for our 4-H exhibitors. Students across the state are enrolling in 4-H and hopefully choosing to be involved in one of the many different livestock projects offered. I recently sat down with Ali Fontenot, St. Martin Parish 4-H Member, sheep exhibitor, and Southwest Region Representative on the Louisiana 4-H Executive Board, to discuss her perspective of the 4-H livestock program. Ali and her family are currently raising their own flock of 12 lambs, with 7 ewes and 5 lambs for her brother and her to show this season. As a 4-H Extension Agent, one of my favorite things to do once school starts up is to visit with returning livestock exhibitors to determine what they will be exhibiting in the upcoming year. If you are pondering getting involved in the 4-H livestock project, I hope this feedback from Ali will give you some insight.

When asked what Ali's favorite part of her sheep project is she explained that the State Fair of Louisiana is her favorite show because it leads to an opportunity to go to the North American International Livestock Show. There are many different opportunities to travel to shows from local events to nationally, depending on your interests. 4-H is never short of opportunities for students to get out and about to further explore their project area.

Premier Exhibitor has had the biggest impact on Ali's livestock career. "It was a huge opportunity for me because I didn't have to have the best sheep in the barn to do well. It was based on my project knowledge and showmanship skills, not how I did in my class. I still remember winning first at my district show for premier exhibitor like it was yesterday, even

though it was 3 years ago. That will definitely be one of my favorite 4-H memories.” Some parishes and districts offer premier exhibitor programs for all ages while the state premier exhibitor program is open to high school students.

When I asked Ali what advice she would give to younger exhibitors, she replied “Win and loose with grace. It’s great to win, but that’s not what showing livestock is always about. You’re learning leadership, responsibility, and many other real world skills that you’ll need, and most of us don’t even realize it.” Such great feedback from a 4-H member- no matter the placing, the livestock program is about you and your project.

I hope that if you were thinking about joining the 4-H livestock project, that Ali swayed you in the right direction. If you are currently an exhibitor, I hope that Ali has encouraged you to go further and grow within your project. If you are interested in getting more information on your parish’s 4-H livestock program, reach out to your parish 4-H Extension Agent at your local LSU AgCenter Extension Office. A list of parish offices can be found at https://www.lsuagcenter.com/portals/our_offices/parishes.



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