



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

Hardin County Extension News Release

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Sheep Tour Takes Producers to Northeast Ohio

by Mark Badertscher, OSU Extension Educator

Hardin County – Members of the Hardin County Sheep Improvement Association toured five sheep farms and an agricultural museum in Wayne and Ashland counties as part of the annual OSU Extension Hardin County Sheep Management Tour held September 14-15. A group of active and retired sheep producers traveled to sites in northeastern Ohio near Wooster. This group included 15 producers from Allen, Hancock, and Hardin Counties. On the trip, they learned about sheep production research along with new and different philosophies of raising and marketing sheep and wool. An emphasis on the trip was innovative and interesting ideas, which help in the management of day-to-day production chores as well as finding improved ways of accomplishing tasks. Some of the individuals participating in this educational trip also will attend a similar trip to gain knowledge from South American producers by visiting sheep farms in Argentina during October.

The local group met at a restaurant for breakfast to go over the weekend's plans, and then traveled to Shreve to visit the Kingsfold Jacob Sheep Farm. Owner Cheryl Gordon provided information about the Jacob breed that combines two characteristics unusual in sheep: It is piebald - dark colored with areas of white wool - and often multi-horned. Most commonly the sheep have four horns. Hand spinners seek out the wool because they like its light and open fleece as well as the color combinations - black, white or a blend of the two.

The local sheep producers then traveled to Buckeye Agriculture Museum and Education Center, located in Wooster. The vision for this recently opened museum dates to the 1960s, when then Governor James Rhodes and his administration were making plans for an ag museum to be located along U.S. 250, near the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (OARDC). The museum also includes renovated meeting space, which local farm and community groups are already booking, and there are rooms dedicated to historic pictures, artwork and other memorabilia that tell the story of agriculture.

The next stop on the tour was the OARDC Sheep Research Center, located near Wooster. This sheep research center is located approximately three miles south of the Ohio State Wooster campus. The facility includes a total confinement building and complete feeding system to utilize silages, haylage, and stover. An additional building aids reproductive physiology research and winter lambing. This building is more traditional in design but has innovative features, such as an open ridge ventilation system and

an above ground nipple water system. A custom corral system was developed over the years to allow handling and management of the flock. Dr. Tony Parker, Associate Chair and Associate Professor of Animal Sciences, OSU College of Food Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences provided information about the current and future research being conducted and planned for this facility.

Staying close to the Wooster area, Roger and Lisa Shearer Showstock was next on the group's itinerary. It is Shearer Show Stock's mission to raise high quality show lambs focusing on genetics what will bring success to their customers' show rings at county, state and national levels. Shearer Show Stock stands behind the values that are important to their family and business. Roger and Lisa gave a tour of their sheep barn and the newly created artificial insemination breeding and lambing room. Other sheep producers bring ewes to this location for breeding using this technique which enables producers to quickly increase the quality of genetics on their farm without owning a superior ram. Roger Shearer is currently a board member of the Ohio Sheep and Wool Program.

Misty Oaks Katahdins was the next farm on the sheep tour. At Misty Oaks Farm near Wooster, Jeff and Kathy Bielek's goal is to produce hardy, healthy, productive and parasite resistant Katahdin sheep that thrive in an easy-care, forage-based system. Operating in Ohio, they were first drawn to the Katahdin sheep breed for its outstanding maternal traits, easy care, hardiness, medium size, natural shedding and ability to excel on grass. They are committed to maintaining these traits in their flock. Bielek's Katahdin sheep farm management procedures are focused on parasite resistance and pasture maintenance. Kathy Bielek is currently a trustee of the Ohio Sheep Improvement Association.

After spending the night in Wooster, the second day of the Hardin County Sheep Management Tour the group visited Mike Stitzlein Club Lambs located near Ashland. Mike currently runs a flock of 250 Hampshire-Suffolk crossbred ewes. He has facilities that fit the needs of living in Ohio. All closed barns in the winter and all summer his sheep range out on pasture. Mike raises good sound correct kind of females that are productive. His goal is to have a good base of foundation females with good structure, soundness, and productivity. He sells many brood ewes, yearling ewes, and ewe lambs at his farm in addition to wether lambs at various online and club lamb sales for 4-H and FFA members. Mike Stitzlein is currently the president of the Ohio Sheep Improvement Association.

After visiting the Mike Stitzlein Club Lambs, the sheep tour group visited the new home of long-time sheep producers Duane and Donna Scheibe. Duane and Donna have been a part of the Hardin County Sheep Management Tour for several years since its beginning around 1994. They are now retired and live on their farm near Jeromesville in Ashland County. The travel group posed for a group photo before leaving the Scheibe residence and returned back to Allen, Hancock, and Hardin County to consider the new ideas and methods learned over the weekend as they continue to take care of and grow their own sheep operations.

Photo caption: Mike Stitzlein, Ashland County sheep producer and president of the Ohio Sheep Improvement Association, explains the use of quality genetics to produce superior lambs to area sheep producers (left to right) Gary Wilson, Amy Schroeder, Donna & David Inbody, and Madelyn Lowery as part of the 2019 Hardin County Sheep Management Tour.