



Introduction to the Sheep & Lamb Industry in **SASKATCHEWAN**



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The Saskatchewan Sheep Development Board provides a Getting Started in Sheep "The Basics" workshop.

This is a two day course covering the basics of the sheep industry. It is designed for those who are looking at getting into sheep and those who are already in the business on the beginner level. This course covers in detail some of the topics mentioned in the following pages and provides potential shepherds with information to guide them into the industry of lamb production.

Please see <http://www.sksheep.com/events.htm> for the Getting Started workshop dates and location or call the office at 306-933-5200 for further information.

The Saskatchewan Sheep Development Board also has a variety of Fact Sheets and materials available in the office as well as online at <http://www.sksheep.com/services.htm>

Advantages of raising sheep:

- Saskatchewan advantage; land, space, availability of clean water
- Canadian lamb is the product of choice
- Consumption of lamb is continuing to rise
- Low cost of entry
- Well-suited to a family enterprise.
- Complements other farming enterprises and is well adapted to part-time farming operations.
- One individual can handle large numbers of sheep effectively
- Flock size can be increased quickly due to multiple births and short time to maturity
- Economic and environmental advantages to multi-species grazing
- Noxious weeds can be controlled using sheep in grazing programs

- Sheep can graze on natural meadows, along waterways, in woodlands, orchards and on harvested crop land
- Sheep are well suited to unused rocky and hilly areas
- Five sheep can be sustained in the same area as one cow
- Sheep can be raised for meat production, wool or both depending on the breed
- Multifaceted market opportunities — farm gate freezer trade, retail meat markets, raw wool, prepared wool, milk, milk products, breeding stock, finished and feeder lambs
- Many existing facilities can be easily adapted to sheep/lamb production
- Nature and distribution of the manure is such that its impact on the environment is often minimal.

The Saskatchewan Sheep Industry

The Saskatchewan Sheep Development Board is a producer controlled extension and marketing service. Five producers elected throughout the province form the board of directors.

The SSDB is funded through fee for services provided to the industry and by a producer checkoff.

There are approximately 1000 producers across the province.

The ewe flock in Saskatchewan is the fourth largest in Canada.

In Saskatchewan the greatest sheep concentration is in the southern half of the province.

Breed selection is an important step in getting started in the sheep industry and there are many breeds being raised in Saskatchewan for the various business operations; meat, dairy and seed or breeding stock.

Important considerations for a Sheep Production System:

Sheep production is a business and is subject to the same economical factors as any production based business. What are your goals and how does your goals fit with your new sheep production business?

Many resources exist to assist all sheep producers, such as the Saskatchewan Sheep Development Board (306) 933-5200.

Predation prevention and control is supported by the Wildlife Damage Compensation Program managed by SCIC.

Measuring available resources is important in determining the maximum size of the flock. An inventory of land, soils, water, forage, fences, tools, shelter and labour is crucial when considering your livestock operation and proper stewardship of the animals in our care.

Good record-keeping is the key to improving production and lowering costs.

There are many different sheep breeds used in the various sheep production systems in Saskatchewan. The variety of breeds reflects the differences in the Saskatchewan topography, resources, reasons for raising sheep, and management system (range, confinement, or semi-confinement).

Meat

Canadian Arcott
Charollais
Clun Forest
Columbia
Dorper
Dorset
Hampshire
Ile De France
Katahdin
North Country Cheviot
Rideau Arcott
South Down
Suffolk
Targhee
Texel

Wool

Merino
Rambouillet
Shetland
Targhee

Dairy

East Friesian
Rideau Arcott

Breeds Common to Saskatchewan:

Selecting the right sheep for your environment requires some research. Make a list of the reasons you want to get into sheep, the market you want to fill, the time and resources you are willing to commit, and whether you want to be a purebred or commercial breeder.

Communicate with feedlot operators, order buyers, sheep producers and your veterinarian. The more questions you ask and the more information you have, the greater your chance of a successful business enterprise.

Remember that most producers like the breed they raise, so talk to more than one person before you make any decisions on breeds. The SSDB will be happy to provide you with a list of producers and buyers willing to talk to new producers. If possible, help out an established producer at lambing or shearing time.

Once you have decided on the breed you want to purchase, you may wish to take an experienced producer with you to assist in examining conformation, health and condition of the flock. Ask to see the producer's flock records, some producers have all of their records in an electronic system. It is important to maintain a record keeping system whether it is manual or electronic.

Look for the following in the flock records:

1. Rate of gain, a 50 day weight (influenced by the ewe), 100 day weight (influenced by the ram)
2. Prolificacy (number of lambs born and raised)
3. General health status of flock e.g. vaccination dates, any vet visits.

For more information on breeds contact:

Saskatchewan Sheep Development Board 306-933-5200 or <mailto:sheepdb@sasktel.net>

Sheep Basics

Body Temperature:	39.0 — 39.5°C (102-103°F)
Pulse rate per minute:	70 — 90
Estrous Cycle:	Polyestrous (repeating cycle)
Length of estrous cycle:	~ 14-19 days
Ovulation:	Toward end of estrous
Length of Gestation:	142 - 154 days
Reproductive period:	1 — 8 years

Sheep Basics (Breed related)

Average height at maturity:	36" at the shoulder
Average Ewe weight:	150 lb.
Average Ram weight:	250 lb.
Average weight at birth:	10 lb.
Average rate of weight gain:	0.75 lb per day
Ready for slaughter:	4 — 6 months
Sexual Maturity:	~ 7 months
Avg. No. of Offspring per birth:	2
Natural breeding season:	late Aug to Feb

Approximate Facility and Feed Requirements

Daily water requirement per ewe:	2 — 2 1/2 gallons
Daily Manure production:	6 lb. per ewe 4 lb. per lamb
Pasture:	5 sheep = 1 animal unit
Grain:	
Ewe — late gestation	1 lb.
— lactation	2 lbs.
Lamb — creep feeds to weaning	0.5 lb.
Feeder to finished weight	2 lb. plus minerals
Hay:	
Ewe Breeding	4.5 lbs.
Maintenance	4 lb.
Late gestation	5 lb. plus grain
Lactation	free choice

Basic Facilities and Equipment

One advantage of sheep production is that you do not need an elaborate building or expensive equipment. Basic sheep husbandry entails providing protection for the flock during wet or cold weather and furnishing shelter for ewes and lambs at lambing time. Even in areas where weather is not severe, sheep should

have shelter during storms and when they are lambing.

Most farms have barns or sheds adaptable to sheep production. One that opens to the south makes good sheep shelter because sheep like lots of sun, light and air. The sheds should be well drained and draft free. A dirt floor is satisfactory.

• open shed floor space	15 to 20 sq. ft/ewe
• lambing pens (1 for every 8 ewes)	4' x 5'
• feed troughs	length/ewe -10" to 14" height off floor-15"
• self feeders for lambs	length/lamb- 3" to 4" height off floor-10"
• barn	
• paddock with waterers	
• grain bins	
• handling chute with holding corral	
• scale	

Fencing

Inadequate fencing is one of the main problems facing potential producers in Saskatchewan. Sheep require better fences than do most livestock. Strong fencing will reduce losses from sheep-killing predators. A high tensile electric fence is preferred for sheep production. Construct an all-electric fence according to manufacturer's recommendations in order to be most effective. Freshly shorn sheep can be trained quickly to respect an electric fence. Use a portable fence to divide the area into small grazing plots. By rotating and completely grazing an area, you maximize forage utilization and aid in controlling internal parasites.

Nutrition

Feed represents the largest single production cost in sheep operations. The most basic aspect of sheep nutrition is daily feed intake. Low intake of nutritious rations results in average animal performance, while high intake of moderate rations results in above-average performance. Sheep consume two to five percent of body weight in dry matter daily.

Feeding Ewes

Sheep are able to convert large amounts of roughage into production of wool and lambs, but there are times when ewes need supplemental feed. Because protein and energy (TDN) requirements depend on the stage of production, ewe feeding and factors affecting fertility can be divided into:

1. Breeding — One month prior to breeding, ewes should be provided with better quality feed to prepare them for breeding.

2. Post Breeding — Maintain good quality feed to ensure viability of the embryo(s)

3. Maintenance — Maintain dry ewes and pregnant ewes in the first three and one half months of gestation on average quality pasture or hay. Ewes should gain 10 lbs. during this time.

4. Late Gestation — During the last six weeks of gestation, ewes should gain 20 pounds. Minimum feed requirements are 24 percent higher during this six week pre-lambing period. Because most of the growth of the unborn lamb takes place during the last six weeks, ewes need supplemental feed to en-

sure healthy lambs and more milk. This is a good time to add some grain to the diet. Continue supplementing the ewes' diet with grain after the lambs are born to ensure lambs are off to a good start. Once the lambs are eight to 10 weeks old, slowly begin to reduce the grain.

Minerals

Prevention is the simplest way to avoid mineral deficiencies in sheep. The calcium-to-phosphorous ratio in sheep rations should not go below 2:1. Sheep fed high concentrate diets need calcium supplements to prevent urinary problems.

Two trace minerals of concern in commercial sheep production are Copper and Selenium. Only seven parts per million (ppm) of copper are required. Levels above 25 ppm are considered toxic. **Avoid swine and cattle feed or trace mineral mixes because of their high copper content.**

Type of Feed

Some breeds are capable of producing a choice carcass while feeding on forage. Good quality forages can provide 100 percent of the nutrient requirements. Winter-born lambs will require an area where they can go to eat separately from the ewes. Locate this creep area in a well-lit place close to the ewes. Keep the troughs clean and the area well-bedded. Provide a palatable creep ration high in protein and energy in suitable feeders for lambs. Often producers buy a commercially prepared ration to get the lambs started early and later make their own ration after the lambs are weaned. It is not necessary to grind, roll, crack or crimp grain: sheep have an efficient chewing/grinding system. When lambs are on full-feed, many breeds are capable of gaining one pound per day on three pounds of feed. After six weeks, the ewes' milk production starts declining. By

the time the lambs are three months old, the ewes are providing very little milk. Lambs should be weaned at two to three months of age and provided with good feed. This allows the ewes to be put on a cheaper maintenance diet.

Managing Ewes at Weaning/Weaning Lambs

Ewes that have their lambs removed without proper management are susceptible to developing mastitis.

Early weaning is practised by most producers at about 60 to 90 days of age. This practice saves money on ewes' supplemental feed costs. If lambs are weaned, ewes can be pastured on poorer quality pastures.

When early weaning is used, take caution when drying up the ewe so as not to spoil the udder. About one week before weaning, take all grain away from the ewes. Do not give the ewes access to feed one day before weaning. Furnish water but no feed of any kind. For 24 hours after weaning, restrict the ewes feed and water. For optimum ewe management during the weaning process continue to restrict or limit feed and water for up to 5 days; now is the time to feed your poorer quality hay and limit excessive pasture grazing. After the fifth day, the ewes can be fed average quality hay and have all the water they want. Observe ewes closely during this weaning process for red and inflamed udders and perform appropriate intervention measures. Examine udders of all ewes in the flock annually before breeding. Cull any ewes with hard, fibrous udder sections.

Feeding Lambs

Feed is a major cost item; therefore, have a definite plan as to what and how you feed your lambs. This will depend on your marketing

plans. Market lamb prices are higher at certain times of the year, so consider net profits rather than maximum or minimum feed costs. Lambs born during January, February and early March should, with creep feed, enable producers to get peak lamb prices normally received during the spring and early summer. Later lambs are often put out to pasture with the ewes. They are finished later for the fall and early winter market.

Feed Conversion in Lambs

- 2 months of age 2-1
- 3 months of age 3-1

Marketing Information

Producers wishing to market their animals through other means can contact the SSDB for:

Pricing or market updates	Establishing market value
Referral services	Transportation guidelines
Brochures, recipes, cut charts, etc.	List of licensed and non-licensed buyers

Services Provided Through the SSDB

Extension, Education & Training

- Seminars/Webinars
- Producer Support
- Communication

Industry Awareness

- Promotion of the Industry and Products
- Ag Awareness
- Consumers
- Potential Producers
- Benefits to Environment
- Wool

Market Development

- Show & Sales
- Lamb Assembly/Marketing
- Market Analysis
- Lamb and Sheep Marketing
- Value-Added Products
- Coordinate local Markets

- 4 months of age 4-1
- 5 months of age 5-1
- 6 months of age 6-1

Marketing Lambs

Producers who so choose can have their lambs marketed to buyers from across Canada through the Saskatchewan Sheep Development Board's marketing service. Sales can be arranged for feeder- or market-weight lambs.

Producers who choose to market their own lambs can contact the board for up-to-date prices and information.

Production Environment/Development

- Ewe Shoppe
- Research
- Demonstrations
- Predation Management
- Flock Health Program
- Regulations
- Industry Partnerships
- Traceability/RFID tag options
- Canadian Sheep and Lamb Food Safe Farm Practices Program
- Facilities
- Medical and Wormers Approval
- Supporting Labour Needs

Organizational Effectiveness

- Resource Management
- Financial Management
- AGM
- Relationship Management

Vision: Leaders of a prosperous sheep industry.

Mission: *"To enable the growth of the Saskatchewan sheep industry through supportive programs and services"*

Mandate: Our Vision and Mission is achieved by:

1. Representing and responding to the needs of all sheep and lamb producers of Saskatchewan.
2. Providing effective communication channels.
3. Providing marketing options and market information for lamb producers.
4. Providing resource stability to the Saskatchewan Sheep Development Board.
5. Providing education, extension and information transfer to assist producers in maximizing returns for lamb, sheep and sheep products.
6. Ensuring access to sheep supplies.
7. Promoting the lamb industry, the consumption of lamb and the use of sheep products.
8. Implementing the strategic plan developed by the sheep industry for the sheep industry.
9. Working in cooperation with other industry groups, marketing associations, commission committees which have objectives consistent with those of the Saskatchewan Sheep Development Board.
10. Working in partnership with the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture.