



Vision for Agricultural Animal Genomics Research
Sheep Industry Perspective
October 30, 2017

1) Please introduce yourself and your company.

Lesa Eidman, Director of Producer Resources and Sustainability

Superior Farms is an employee owned company with more than 400 employee-owners nationwide who take pride in their individual roles and contributions to the company's success. As North America's largest processor and marketer of lamb and the recognized leader in the retail and foodservice markets, we provide products and services to customers throughout the United States and more than 10 other countries. We rely on more than 1000 family farms and ranches producing lamb across the country to provide a consistent supply year round and we are committed to assisting them in being productive, sustainable and efficient.

2) What it is that you wish you could do, but just cannot do today due to cost or lack of technology?

Efficiency and innovation are two key words that drive our day to day business and thought processes. There are a variety of factors that influence the sheep industry in today's market place. However, there are two specific production issues that have posed the biggest challenges due to production, cost and the lack of technology:

One of the biggest influences that we have in the US sheep industry is the amount of imported product sold in the meat case at a lower price point than domestically raised lamb. Australia and New Zealand have a competitive advantage due to the economies of scale of their sheep and lamb industry as well as the influence of the current exchange rate. In order to remain competitive in the meat case it is necessary for the US sheep industry to produce a consistent lamb product at a lower price point. This can be achieved through innovation and efficiencies, many of which are still to be identified. One of the ways to remain competitive is to produce more pounds of lamb or lambs per breeding ewe.

The second biggest influence on availability and marketability of US lamb is the seasonality in which lambs are born within the US. 86% of the US lamb crop is born in the first 5 months of the calendar year. This causes a lot of distress in the industry, particularly within the processing sector since we must be able to process lambs year round to supply consumers with a fresh American lamb product. Many producers are hesitant to change their breeding schedules since it is based on weather and availability of feed as well as the ability for ewes to breed in the off-season. Assisting producers in identifying successful ways to breed their ewes in the off-season would be a tremendous hurdle to overcome in order to produce a consistent supply of lambs throughout the year.

- 3) What is/are the biggest current and 10-year challenge(s) to your industry that changing traits in your animals might be able to address?

If we could identify and know the traits that address the issues named above, we would be in a far better position in the market place. Additionally, identifying disease (such as OPP and footrot) and parasite resistance traits that effect commercial producers financially and productively would have a huge benefit to the producer's sustainability and viability within the industry. Other genetic traits of interest would be: feed efficiency, flavor and taste profiles of the meat, meat quality, as well as other productive traits that will assist the producers bottom line.

In addition to identifying and/or changing the traits the driving factor in regards to the genomic technology is to have it available at a 'sheep affordable' price. Many of the genetic projects and tests available are priced at a level that the commercial sheep industry cannot afford. A high throughput low cost genetic tool is absolutely essential in order for the commercial sheep industry to fully adopt new genetic technology.

- 4) Are there opportunities between different segments of the industry? For example, something that does not fall within the wheelhouse of the breed association/company or the meat industry (expand to any topic one can think of), but would be very beneficial for both industries?

There are an endless amount of opportunities for all segments of the industry to work cooperatively. There is a current industry project that is following seed stock rams productivity in a commercial ewe flock. Data was collected on the rams before they were turned out with the ewes. After lambing parentage testing will be conducted on all lambs in order to know their sire. As the lambs move from the producer to the feeder weights will be collected. Once the lambs are processed carcass data will be collected and traced back to the sire of the lambs. This project involves the breed associations, seed stock producers, commercial producers, the feeders and the packer. Projects like this need to occur more often that involve all sectors, and this is a great first step in getting more collaborate and transparency within the industry.

The electronic/camera grading that is being implemented at our packing facilities will allow for further transparency on carcass quality and consistency. This technology will begin to know more about the carcass quality that they are ultimately delivering to the consumer.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback for your meeting and discussion. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.