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Late Summer 2006

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www.dsana.org

Editor's notes

Pat Elliot

Late Summer 2006

Late Summer - 2006 already! I hope you are planning on coming to Wisconsin for our annual meeting this fall. First, it's a lot of fun--a good break from routine. The information you get fresh from the sheep's mouth, so to speak, and the networking you will find invaluable. A doctor I knew once said that if he learned one or two new things at a medical conference, it was worthwhile to him. You will be way ahead of that! So plan for how to be gone (that can be hard) and send in your registration! See the notice in this issue.

This issue we have articles on sheep dairying in Mexico by Yves Berger, and a report from Kim Duty on the South Region Liaison which is very active. I want to hear from the other regions! Surely we are not the only ones who are growing!

There are also articles about sheep dairying in Canada and about somatic cell counts I receive several publications that have articles on cow dairying. I find they are worth reading and that I can get many ideas on milk production from them with a little translation on my part to sheep.

**Membership ■ L'Adhésion**

DSANA welcomes all current or future sheep dairy producers, artisanal farmstead cheese producers, sellers, suppliers, industry professionals, and academic researchers with an interest in sheep dairying, dairy genetics, sheep milk cheese production, and sheep milk based product development. DSANA also welcomes any individual who is a friend of the sheep dairying industry.

DSANA accueille tous les producteurs (trices) de lait de brebis, les transformateurs artisanaux, les fromagers de ferme, les vendeurs, les fournisseurs, les professionnels dans la filière des ovins laitiers, les chercheurs académiques...enfin, tous et toutes qui s'intéressent vivement à la production et à la transformation du lait de brebis. Nous accueillons également les ami(e)s de l'industrie laitière ovine.

Benefits of membership ■ Bénéfices de l'adhésion à DSANA

- ✓ Quarterly DSANA Newsletter • *Journal tous les trois mois*
- ✓ DSANA website • *Site web de DSANA*
- ✓ Discount admission to the Great Lakes Dairy Sheep Symposium • *Tarif réduit pour le symposium annuel des Grands Lacs sur la brebis laitière*
- ✓ Voting rights to help determine the future of the association in the industry • *Droit de vote pour déterminer les orientations de l'Association au sein de l'industrie*

Annual Dues

A principal member is one who is currently milking sheep in a state/province licensed facility, or is actively involved in getting milk to the market, brokering milk sales, producing or distributing sheep milk based products.

Un membre principal producteur de lait de brebis avec un agrément provincial ou d'état, ou êtes-vous activement impliqué dans l'achat ou la vente de lait de brebis aux transformateurs, la production de produits à base de lait de brebis.

Principal Member/Membre principal \$50 US/ \$62.50* cdn

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operation as their needs change. Aside from Peter's consulting work, there is no off-farm income supplementing their livestock enterprises. Hard work, determination and vision have brought success, and will continue to carry the Welkerlings through their next transition. In their forties, they have many years to go to retirement and lots of plans to implement on the way there.

**Our Mission ■ Notre Mission**

DSANA will promote effective dairy sheep management by educating, supporting and encouraging new and established sheep milk dairies, farmsteads, and artisanal sheep milk cheesemakers.

DSANA fera la promotion de la gestion efficace des troupeaux de brebis laitières par la formation, l'encouragement et le soutien des producteurs (trices) de lait de brebis (autant les débutants que les plus expérimentés), ainsi que les fromageries fermières et artisanales.

DSANA will promote cooperation and exchange of information among producers of sheep milk and cheesemakers.
DSANA incitera la coopération et l'échange d'idées entre producteurs (trices) et transformateurs (trices) de lait de brebis.

DSANA will also promote the products manufactured from sheep milk.
DSANA fera la promotion des produits fabriqués à partir du lait de brebis.

DSANA will help producers organize activities for the genetic improvement of dairy sheep.
DSANA soutiendra les producteurs/trices pour les aider à organiser des activités visant l'amélioration génétique des ovins laitiers.

DSANA will endeavor to inform and educate the public as to the merits and availability of sheep dairy products.
DSANA s'efforcera d'informer et d'éduquer le public quant (aux mérites) à la valeur nutritive et à la disponibilité des produits fait à partir du lait de brebis.

DSANA will strive to help foster international understanding and the free exchange of ideas between North American based producers and producers abroad.

DSANA s'efforcera de favoriser une meilleure entente internationale et soutiendra l'échange libre des idées entre les producteurs d'Amérique du Nord, ainsi qu'ailleurs dans le monde.

Wisconsin to host 12TH Great Lakes Dairy Sheep Symposium November 9 – 11, 2006

David L. Thomas

The annual Great Lakes Dairy Sheep Symposium (GLDSS) has been an important venue for potential dairy sheep producers and sheep milk processors to gain a better understanding of the industry and for present producers and processors to obtain new ideas to improve their operations. The 12th symposium returns to Wisconsin after very successful recent symposia in Ithaca, New York in 2002, Quebec City, Quebec in 2003, Hudson, Wisconsin in 2004, and Burlington, Vermont in 2005.

The 12th GLDSS will be held November 9 – 11, 2006 at the Midway Hotel Riverfront Resort, LaCrosse, Wisconsin and will include practical lectures by scientists, progressive producers and creative sheep milk processors, and tours of operating sheep dairy farms and a sheep milk processing plant.

International speakers will be Gilles Lagriffoul, a dairy sheep geneticist and management specialist with the National Agricultural Research Institute of France at Toulouse and Harold Gonyou, an animal behaviorist from the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. Gilles Lagriffoul will discuss somatic cells in ewe milk and it's relevance to the production of quality milk and Harold Gonyou will discuss sheep behavior and its implications for sheep management. Additional topics to be discussed are the economics of dairy sheep production, organic cheese production, grazing research, effects of daylength on dairy sheep production, and a review of different types of dairy sheep production and marketing operations.

Tours will be made to the dairy sheep farms of Dean and Brenda Jensen and John Henry and Mary Miller of Westby, Wisconsin and the Carr Valley Cheese Plant in LaValle, Wisconsin owned by Sid Cook.

The 12th GLDSS is sponsored by the Dairy Sheep Association of North America and organized by the Wisconsin Sheep Dairy Cooperative and the University of Wisconsin-Madison with major financial support from the Babcock Institute for International Dairy Research and Development of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

A symposium brochure, sponsor information, and on-line registration can be found at <http://www.cals.wisc.edu/ccs/Current%20Programs.html> or information can be obtained from Yves Berger, Symposium Chair, at yberger@facstaff.wisc.edu (phone:715-635-3735). Early registration deadline is October 20, 2006.

Opportunity for change: Peter & Christiane Welkerling, Spruce View, Alberta, Canada

By Kathleen Raines, Used by permission of Cathy Gallivan, Ph.D., Editor of Sheep Canada

There's a wonderful cookbook called *High Plains: The Joy of Alberta Cuisine* by Calgary food writer Cinda Chavich. Published in 2001, *High Plains* "celebrates the flavours of Alberta" and won both a Cuisine Canada Cookbook and a Cuisine Canada Culture Award.

The book's introduction features a profile of central farmers Christiane and Peter Welkerling. The Welkerlings emigrated from Germany in 1989 and settled on a quarter section of land near Spruce View, a tiny hamlet between Calgary and Edmonton. They began milking sheep in 1994, starting with a Rideau-Arcott flock used as recipients for East Friesian ewes ("Too many," Peter says) with Christiane processing absolutely wonderful asiago and feta cheese (the sundried tomato was my favorite) and yogurt. Their high quality, unique product was marketed through a Calgary-based grassroots network of producers and high end restaurant chefs called Earth to Table.

The Welkerlings were pioneers in the North American sheep industry with their importations of East Friesian genetics from Germany, Holland, and Switzerland. They used frozen East Friesian semen on the original Rideau-Arcott females to produce a heavy-milking crossbred. In 1996 their first purebred East Friesians were born on the farm from frozen embryos. With "lots of hard work," Peter says the dairy was able to provide the family (the couple has two teenage sons, Jan and Christoph) with a good living on their 160 acres.

By 2001, despite the excellent visibility given their product in *High Plains*, the sheep dairy operation had been phased out. In 1999 Peter was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS), a disease of the central nervous system and the Welkerlings implemented the first of a number of changes to their operation.

The core milking flock and equipment were sold, with a small number of females held back. These were crossed with Texel rams to produce top quality F1 slaughter lamb that in Europe is known as the Swifter. Additional land was purchased and rented to accommodate an upsized cow-calf operation of 130 head. Building on connections established through the Earth to Table alliance, a small pasture egg-laying enterprise was started. The Welkerlings have a grading license to handle the eggs from neighboring flocks along with their own. Peter has maintained an active

role in the sheep dairy industry as a consultant. Advertisements in German farm publications have been successful in attracting seasonal workers to handle much of the heavier farm load.

We haven't had a normal year since we made the change to move out of dairying," says Peter. Two years of severe drought and feed shortage were followed by the BSE border closure. The Welkerlings held on, expanded their revised operation, and continued to look to the future for new opportunities.

By 2005 the Welkerling sheep flock had shrunk to a handful of purebred East Friesian females and a new business plan in keeping with the family's needs was being developed. Twenty females were artificially inseminated last fall using the 10-12 lines of imported semen the Welkerlings have in frozen storage with the goal of once again building a small (40 ewe) sheep dairy operation, this time with an exciting and unique focus. While he's currently able to move around the farm using walking sticks and his trusty quad, Peter anticipates the he may one day be in a wheelchair. He and Christiane are designing a milking parlor that will allow him to work from a wheelchair, as part of an integrated operation featuring a fully accessible bed and breakfast.

The B&B will offer an agritourism experience currently not available to those with mobility challenges and will in turn link to the processing end run by Christiane. Her intention is to offer courses in small-scale cheese making and to market their own product locally. The flexibility of sheep dairying and their own successful track record in the industry makes the potential for this new venture excellent. Milking two to three times a week will provide Christiane with enough milk to do one batch of cheese, with the lambs doing the rest of the work. With the prolific East Friesian ewes commonly weaning a 230% lamb crop, market lambs and the ongoing demand for the Welkerling's high quality Friesian genetics (previously exported to the United States, Mexico and Chile) will supplement the dairy operation. A smaller land base will reduce the need for machinery and outside labor (an increasing challenge in today's economy), and eliminate the need for Peter to climb on and off the tractor. Christiane is particularly excited with the potential for agricultural education their new undertaking will offer, as visitors experience the novelty of seeing where their food comes from and how it is made.

Seventeen years in Canada have presented the Welkerlings with challenges and opportunities. The commitment to farming and to the sheep industry is evident in their determination to continually adapt their

Celtic Shepherd Creamery

Pat Elliott

When I was at the American Cheese Society annual meeting in July, I was fortunate enough to have an invitation to visit Brendan Enright's new sheep milk creamery in Canby, Oregon just south of Portland, Oregon. I met Brendan at the Dairy Sheep Symposium in Vermont last November and was impressed by his resolve. And here it is in fruition.

His dream is to farm the way his family in Ireland has farmed since the early 1800s. He still goes back there periodically to visit and gain inspiration. His father was a shepherd in Ireland as a young man.

Brendan began actualizing his farm in 2001 when he bought the 40 acre farm and began metamorphosing it into the present home for about 80 dairy sheep and 20 others, mainly Icelandic, that he is using to cross for hardiness. He has remodeled a lovely 45 foot barn to include a single 12 milking parlor, storage, and make rooms with a Celtic appearance on approach.

He milks in the evening, the lambs being with the ewes otherwise. This is producing about 700 pounds of milk weekly which is pasteurized for fresh cheeses. I was served some delicious yogurt and Kinnity cream, a soft, ripened cheese, and fresh cheese with herbs—several varieties are in development. They were delicious. Brendan is marketing them in Portland, Corvallis, and Eugene as well as in Canby to restaurants and stores.

Brendon is, and has been, a bankruptcy and divorce lawyer in Aurora. He plans on expanding his enterprise into a viable commercial creamery that will support himself and others. He is making a great start!



This newsletter/Dairy Sheep Association of North America will not be responsible for any mishap resulting from an individual(s) following any advice published in this newsletter.

Materials submitted for articles or advertisements will be subject to the approval of the DSANA. Views and opinions represented in this newsletter are not necessarily those of DSANA.

Tips for reducing somatic cell count

Pat Elliot

Can you feel your adrenaline rise when you hear the words "somatic cell counts?" High counts can cause quite a problem for dairy sheep farmers.

The SCC, as you know, is the leucocyte count in the milk. High counts generally indicate infection with bacteria (mastitis). SCC rises more with an infection in sheep than cows so just a few infected animals can make the bulk tank count too high.

The tendencies of sheep to lie down while waiting to be milked and to lie down in the same places in the field seem to be more marked than in dairy cattle. Also, we are working with more animals for the same amount of milk—more teat ends to get infected! In sorting out some old material recently I came across an article on SCC Crisis Management from 1999 with some good ideas which I will summarize for you:

Steps to rapidly reduce your bulk tank SCC:

1. Identify animals with high SCC. That means individual samples that you take to your regional lab (check with your extension agent or vet) or join DHIA (I did the latter and am well satisfied). You can also do the California Mastitis Test.
2. You can culture individual animals with high SCC and treat them on the basis of the results, separating the milk for lambs or cats.
3. It is best to segregate these animals and milk them last to avoid spreading the infection.
4. Consider the whole farm-herd health, cleanliness, parasite burden, dryness, comfort of animals, nourishment of animals. Records help!
5. Milking machines need to be tested regularly to provide stable vacuum, adequate pulsation, and gentle milking action.
6. Most important—clean, dry, sanitized teats!
7. Then, if the repeat count on an individual is still high, CULL HER. I learned that from Yves Berger first and it has made a huge difference for me and my peace of mind.

South region liaison report

Kim Duty

Tennessee Welcomes Locust Grove Farm

Tennessee is getting ready to welcome its first licensed sheep dairy – Locust Grove Farm – thanks to the efforts of Tim Clark and Sheri Palko. The partnership farm was formed in 2005, when Tim, a Baptist minister who had been raising sheep for 20 years, and Sheri, a software engineer with a passion for herding dogs, joined forces to bring sheep's milk cheese to East Tennessee.

Construction began in March on the milking parlor, creamery and aging room, and final licensing approval was expected by the end of July. Notably, the two say that the Tennessee regulators have been very helpful and encouraging.

This summer, Sheri and Tim are milking nine ewes and perfecting their cheeses. This summer and fall they will be making two cheeses. The first is a raw, semi-hard sheep's milk cheese called Galloway, which Tim learned to make from Scottish cheesemaker Allan Brown. The second is a yet-to-be-named Gouda made from a combination of sheep and Jersey milk.

Next year, in their first year of full production, they plan to milk 40 to 60 ewes. The grass-based farm will begin their next breeding season with approximately 80 ewes. Most of the ewes are at least 50% dairy, and half are a high percentage dairy, primarily East Friesian. They'll continue increasing the dairy genetics in their flock with two East Friesian ram lambs and one East Friesian/Lacaune ram lamb.

More information on the farm is available at www.locustgrovefarm.net.

Farm Updates

In addition to Locust Grove Farm, at least four other sheep dairies are in the process of starting up. Remarkably, two of the four are near Knoxville, Tennessee within minutes of Locust Grove Farm. Kristian Holbrook is helping turn Blackberry Farm, a top-rated luxury inn at the Great Smoky Mountains into the state's second licensed dairy. Creamery construction was underway this spring, with the goal of being operational by this fall. In the meantime, Kristian is milking his flock and making fabulous cheeses for the Inn's guests. Across town is the Treffert family and HimmelAlm Farm. The Trefferts completed their first lambing season this spring and are milking the flock with a portable milker while developing their plans to build a commercial

facility. They have been using the milk to make cheese for friends and family, all of which have been well received.

In Virginia, Kim & Steve Duty's True Ewe Farm is on track to join Everona Dairy as that state's second sheep dairy. The 40-ewe operation is targeting summer of 2007 to be operational. After a late spring/early summer lambing season, the couple started constructing their milking facility in June. They will spend the summer and fall perfecting recipes and building their creamery.

Further south, Jeff Earnest and Kelly Graddy are working on Florida's first sheep dairy. Their Ewe Remembered Farm is based on East Friesian and Katahdin sheep. This spring, they started construction on their milking parlor after completing their first lambing in April.

Regional Meeting

On March 6, several of the start ups met in Knoxville to exchange notes on their experiences to date and to discuss opportunities to cooperate and share resources. Participants included Blackberry Farm, Locust Grove Farm, HimmelAlm Farm and True Ewe Farm.

DSANA South Resources

South East Dairy Sheep Cooperative:
www.diamonjksfarms.com/index.htm

Sheep dairying in Mexico

Yves M. Berger

In mid-June 2006, I responded to an invitation from the Sheep Producers Association of Queretaro, Mexico, to give a series of seminars on sheep dairying. The workshops were organized through the relationship existing between the International Programs of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Tecnológico de Monterrey, Mexico.

Queretaro is one of the smaller states of the Mexican Federation with Queretaro City located some 130 miles north of Mexico City at more than 1800 meters of altitude. The city of Queretaro has about one million inhabitants expanding every day with modern buildings but keeps an atmosphere of quaint little town with a grandiose aqueduct (18th century) and a beautiful historical downtown laced with pedestrian areas, multitude of small restaurants with music, churches, flowers, fountains and vendors of all types.

The agriculture of the area is based mostly on alfalfa (10 cuts per year) and corn although the area receives very little rain. Large dairy cattle operations can be seen everywhere as well as large chicken growing farms. Where irrigation is not possible, the cactus is king and a meager native corn tries to survive. The state of Queretaro is also home to 140,000 sheep of mostly local breeds but also of Pelibuey, Dorper, Kathadin (hair sheep being more and more popular) and some of our domestic breeds such as Dorset and Suffolk.

About 40 people attended the three days of seminars, all of them showing a strong interest in dairy sheep. The attendance was composed mostly of technicians but also of a few producers already in the process of milking sheep. The topics covered were: Sheep dairying for beginners, Breeds of dairy sheep, Economics of sheep dairying, Milking machines, General management, Milk quality, Weaning systems, Rearing of lambs, etc... All subjects generated a lot of questions and discussion.

The seminars were followed by two days of farm visits including two dairy sheep farms, a large dairy cow operation, a Kathadin breeding stock operation and a large Dorper and East Friesian breeding stock operation. All farms were well managed, extremely cleaned and with well fed animals. The dairy sheep operations are extremely similar to the ones existing in the East of the US. About 70-80 ewes are milked on an elevated platform with cascading yoke stanchion. One farm is milking in buckets using a wheelbarrow type vacuum pump and the other farm is using a low line pipe line system. Both farms are using a very simple, very low cost open air construction. One farm is grazing the ewes on irrigated alfalfa all year around while the other is feeding the same TMR as the large dairy herd of the farm. Both farms are processing their milk. The first one is making an aged Pyrenees type cheese that is aged in a dug out cave on the farm. This farm is certified organic and sells organic cheeses. The other farm is making a feta cheese and a Manchego aged in a cooler. Not surprisingly, the greatest challenge of the two farms is the marketing of the cheese, not because of a lack of market, but because of not enough products to sell in one case (sheep are producing only in the 400 pounds range), and not enough time in the other.

Because of the low cost of labor, simple structures for sheep housing and milking, Mexican dairy sheep producers are able to have

a low cost of production. The cheese is sold to high end restaurants and hotels for half the price of our cheese in the United States. The dairy sheep industry in Mexico is really in an embryonic stage at this point and we cannot expect Mexican dairy sheep products to flood the American market. However, it is in the hands of highly educated people with a high interest. I expect this industry to grow as soon as a source of better dairy sheep is found.



Fig. 1 Senor Javier Perez showing his milking parlor.



Fig. 2 The dugout cave