

Maine Sheep Breeders' Association

# THE PRODUCER

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No. 112

## Maine Shepherd Researches Organic Parasite Control

A Report from the Noon Family Sheep Farm ...

by Jean Noon

### Coming Soon:

- MSBA Board Meeting  
July 13
- World Sheep & Wool Conf., Quebec  
July 17 - 23
- MSBA Board Meeting  
September 14
- The Big E  
Sep 17 - Oct 3
- Vermont Sheep & Wool Festival  
October 2 - 3
- Maine Shepherd  
& Goat Herders School  
October 22 - 23
- MSBA Annual Meeting  
October 23

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I operate a small 50-60 ewe organic sheep farm in southern Maine. During the fall of 2002 I learned through Coastal Enterprises about the Northeast SARE Grant Program (Sustainable Agriculture, Research and Education [www.uvm.edu/~nesare/](http://www.uvm.edu/~nesare/)). I was interested because I am concerned about the health of my Flock. I was worried that I would be unable to continue with organic management under the newly implemented organic standards. These standards as updated in 2002 require producers to use only "natural" materials to treat parasites in sheep and lambs. While we have always used organic farming practices we had been allowed to continue worming our sheep with *Ivermectin*. We had reduced the prescribed worming schedule to twice a year and were not worming meat lambs unless they appeared to need it. If a lamb happened to need treatment we would hold it from slaughter at least 40

days. During 2002 the health, growth rate and feed conversion of my lambs diminished alarmingly and I was suspicious that not using chemical anthelmintics (*Ivermectin*) was the cause.

Being highly skeptical about the effectiveness of organic wormers, but unwilling to abandon my organic market (or the organic ideal), I tried using two commercial products that are organically approved. Results were not satisfactory. Feeding rates and methods of administering these materials have not been adequately established for lambs. The compounds are to be mixed in the feed. As my lambs grow they have free choice access to organic grain, hay, salt, water, and pasture. I found the lambs would not eat the supplement mixtures all at once and I was concerned that dosages would be irregular. I was not convinced that the

Cont. on page 3



Scott Bowdridge wows the crowd with his shearing at this year's Fiber Frolic.

## 2004 Maine Shepherd & Goat Herders School

This year's Maine Shepherd school will take place in late October and will be a partnering event with goat producers from around Maine. Sheep and goat producers have been working together to plan this special school. The event is designed in three parts to satisfy different interests of producers and consumers - Farm Tours, a Lamb & Goat Cookery School, and a Lamb & Goat Marketing Summit. The farm tours will take place on Friday, October 22 and will feature two goat operations and one sheep operation all situated in Central Maine. In addition, the new food science

Cont. on page 4





## Thinking of Going Organic?

By Kari Luehman

Organic agriculture is a system that has been designed to rebuild healthy soils and restore our earth. When you choose a sustainable, organic approach to farming you are helping to support local communities, enhance flock health, strengthen the environment, and renew our natural resources for future generations. General requirements for organic livestock production include: using 100% organically grown feed (grains) and forage (pastures), not using synthetic hormones or genetic engineering, not using synthetic pesticides – internal, external or on pastures. Producers encourage livestock health through good cultural and management practices.

Organic sheep farming differs from conventional in two major ways. First, is that of parasite control. Through land and animal management, good nutrition, and the isolation of affected animals, it is possible to control parasites naturally. The nutritional and behavioral effects of controlled organic grazing serves to minimize the stress on the animals and thus keeps the sheep's immune systems functioning at a much higher level. Clean pasture management and sanitation can aid in parasite control as well. The second distinction has to do with the feeding and grazing of the livestock. Organic standards require that producers respect the natural carrying capacity of their land. This means that the land will not be overgrazed and the animals will live on the kind of soil they need to stay healthy and thrive. Although organic grain is an option, there are important reasons to consider grass feeding. In addition to the obvious benefits of fresh air and exercise, grass fed sheep have higher concentrations of many nutrients and vitamins as opposed to animals on a grain based diet. Also, the acidity of the ruminant gut is altered when grain dominates the diet. This fosters the growth of microorganisms that can be harmful to humans. Gourmet restaurants are now serving meat that is raised in Argentina that is grass-fed, healthy and tasty. We can support our domestic economy by striving to produce the same quality products on our soil.

Organic wool: simply put, it is as natural as natural can be. Besides being totally environmentally sound, it is safe for people with chemical sensitivities and in some cases the use of wool may actually alleviate mold and mite allergies. But is there a demand for organic wool? Matt Mole of the Vermont Organic Fiber Co. thinks so. He is unable to buy enough organic wool regionally to meet demand despite paying a premium price. Organic wool is further enhanced by organic processing. Most people who seem to be allergic to wool are actually allergic to the chemicals used in processing. Organic processing ensure that customers will not be exposed to the pesticides and hundreds of complex chemi-



*Bill Huntington and Kari Luehman opened Hope Spinnery earlier this year. Hope Spinnery is a business, an educational center and an art space in central Maine. They have a wind-powered fiber processing mill and are dedicated to all natural processing methods and supporting local businesses and farms.*

cals used in conventional manufacturing. People must realize that the skin, scalp and hair are remarkably efficient at absorbing toxins and carcinogens. In fact, some toxins can do more harm absorbed through the skin because they lodge directly in fat cells, bypassing the liver.

The market for organic products is growing which could translate to increasing your economic sustainability. Following the practices of organic sheep farming may mean lower feeding and housing costs, higher quality pastures, and more integrated management of parasites and diseases. MOFGA (Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association) are the folks to contact concerning organic certification. Within Maine, there are programs that may help fund the transition to organic farming as well as other farm improvements that may be needed to increase viability. So whether you see organic farming in your future or need to expand your current productivity, these organizations may be of help.

### Farms for the Future:

A joint program of the Maine Dept of Agriculture, Food & Rural resources and Coastal Enterprises, Inc  
Contact Mort Mather 207 772-5356

### FAME – Financial Authority of Maine :

Agricultural Marketing Loan Fund

Contact: Maine Dept of Agriculture 207 287-7620

### VAPG Value Added Producer Grants

Contact: 207 990-9160

Information from this article is from Vermont Organic Fiber Company [www.vtorganicfiber.com](http://www.vtorganicfiber.com), Thirteen Mile Lamb and Wool Co. [www.lambandwool.com](http://www.lambandwool.com), Organic Trade Association [www.ota.com](http://www.ota.com), and Hope Spinnery [www.hopespinnery.com](http://www.hopespinnery.com).

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**Parasites...** *from page 1* treatments were effective. I took fecal samples to my veterinarian and was told that my lambs needed treatment. They had parasites. I needed a better idea of what was happening. I wanted to know which parasites were the problem and how many parasites there were. I treated the poorest lambs with Ivermectin, they recovered, and had to be marketed as natural.

I searched the Internet for the results of controlled experiments that would support the effectiveness of organic anthelmintic materials and found none that were convincing. I did find several references indicating that garlic might be effective. Garlic is known to contain 28 active antibacterial compounds. Theories abound that claim that garlic helps support the immune system and in that way boosts resistance to parasites.

For this SARE Grant I designed and implemented a controlled experiment to measure the effectiveness of two commercially available natural wormers and garlic barrier juice. At the same time the identity of the naturally resistant ewe lambs was noted for retention as breeding stock. I am a long time friend and fellow Maine shepherd with Dr. Tom Settlemyre, and have been following his work on genetic resistance to parasites. Dr. Settlemyre agreed to be my technical advisor and showed me how to take fecal samples and identify and count parasites. His assistance on this project was invaluable.

**The Noon Family Sheep Farm** is a Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) [www.mofga.org](http://www.mofga.org) certified organic sheep farm. We winter 50-60 ewes and lambs in western York County and have been raising sheep since 1970. Our original sheep were Columbias purchased indirectly from the UVM flock dispersal. Since that time the flock has evolved into a commercial mix of Columbia-Rambouillet-Leicester-Suffolk, etc. bloodlines including colored and white woolled brood ewes. We direct market value added lamb at select fairs and festivals through our well-known lamb barbecue food booth. We also sell hay, wool, yarn, sheepskins, and lamb at the farm. Most of the year this is a part-time operation, the exception being at the fairs, during lambing, and during haying season.

#### METHODS

This project used our own farm and flock as a laboratory. Lambs were designated into four groups, one control and three treatment groups. Fecal samples were taken by placing each lamb into a crate (on a scale) in the sorting chute. Using a glove, a sample was removed from the lamb's rectum. The lamb was then treated ac-

cording to its group assignment.

In order to have an accurate reading of parasite loading the eggs per gram system called the "Modified McMaster Egg Counting Technique" developed by ADVANCED EQUINE PRODUCTS was used. This uses a gridded slide and a formula to calculate eggs per gram of fecal material. It is important to have someone help you visually identify parasites under magnification as there are seeds and other foreign materials that can be confusing.

**Coccidia** (Eimeria) was one of the parasites that I counted during my testing. These are tiny parasites that live in the cells of the sheep's intestines. Coccidia are thought to be a minor threat to the health of the sheep as the lambs usually develop resistance to them over time. They are occasionally problematic in lambs. The garlic treatment did reduce the coccidia counts significantly prior to the drop in numbers in late June due to the natural rise in resistance immunity after exposure.

The other parasite I counted was **Haemonchus Contortus** (H. Contortus) or the barber pole worm, which is a blood sucking intestinal parasite that is dangerous to lambs and has developed immunity to several

*continued on page 5*

#### Settlemyre Farm --

### Suffolk Flock Dispersal

With regret I realize it is time to slow down and announce the complete dispersal of my registered flock of Suffolk sheep. This flock was established in 1971 and has produced winners in the show ring, ram test programs and in meat production. No animals will be held back. The flock features genetics from Kimm (Iowa) and Ulrich (Illinois) as well as our own breeding. I offer 15 registered Suffolk ewes and 31 ram lambs and ewe lambs. I also have 8 crossbred Rambouillet/Suffolk ewes for excellent market lamb production. A unique opportunity. All animals are enrolled in the USDA Scrapie program. Production records available.

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**School...** *from page 1* department of the University of Maine will hold an open house to end the tour day. A Lamb & Goat Cookery School is planned for Friday evening, October 22 and all day Saturday, October 23 at Pineland Commons in New Gloucester. At least two area specialty chefs will instruct up to 20 people on preparing goat meat and lamb in several different dishes. MSBA recently received over \$2100 from the American Lamb Board to present this cookery school. This school is seen as an opportunity to connect producers with consumers.

The Lamb & Goat Marketing Summit will take place at Pineland Commons on Saturday, October 23<sup>rd</sup> and will feature sheep and goat buyer from New Holland Pennsylvania, Dr. Robert Herr as the lead instructor. The summit is designed to equip sheep and goat producers with the skill and tools necessary to effectively market their livestock.

The MSBA Annual Meeting is planned for noon to 1:30PM as part of the summit and cookery school.

More details will soon be available on the two-day event on Cooperative Extension's website at [www.umext.maine.edu](http://www.umext.maine.edu) or you may call Extension Educator Richard Brzozowski at 800-287-1471 to make sure you receive the mailing with registration information.

## 2004 Easter Auction Report

*from Dick Brzozowski*

The special Easter Auction was held on April 3<sup>rd</sup> at Tilton's Auction Facility in Corinth. The stands were filled to nearly capacity with an estimated 150 or more people. Prices were high and there were several serious bidders. Goats were sold per animal (by the head) and lambs and sheep were sold by the pound. Some of the best prices were received by weaned lambs at an average of \$2.00/pound.

*cont. on page 6*

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10/04

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## Wool Pool Wrap-Up

*with Claire Mikolayunas*

Many thanks to all the helping hands that made the 2004 Wool Pool a success! The wool could not have been sorted, graded, packed, stomped, sewed and loaded without your help. This year's wool pool collected 9,237 pounds of wool, competently graded by Jeff Jordan into 51 pounds of fine, 6,498 pounds of medium, 179 pounds of coarse and 2,499 pounds of belly wool. Wool sales were up by 4,000 pounds from last years' pool. Twenty five members participated in the wool pool, down from last years' 27.

Based on the pounds of wool sold, here is the economic breakdown of the 2004 Wool Pool:

Pounds of wool	Price/lb. to MSBA	Price/lb. to producers	Return to MSBA	Return to Producers
Fine - 51	\$1.25	\$1.15	\$5.10	\$58.65
Medium - 6,498	\$0.60	\$0.50	\$649.80	\$3249
Coarse - 179	\$0.25	\$0.15	\$17.90	\$26.85
Bellies - 2,499	\$0.10	\$0.07	\$74.97	\$174.93

The total return to producers is \$3509.43. The total return to MSBA from the pool is \$747.77. Subtracting from this \$600 for trucking, \$200 for the wool pool manager position and \$197.70 for wool bags, MSBA lost \$249.93 on the pool.

The real success of the Wool Pool was it's coordination with the Fiber Frolic. Holding the pool in a public venue is a benefit to consumers as they learn that high quality wool is produced in their neighborhood, by their farming neighbors. The pool also reminds producers that their product is valuable to the public. I hope the Wool Pool continues this relationship with the Fiber Frolic, allowing families and producers to share in the experience. A special thank you to the families and young volunteers from 4-H who lent many energetic hands on the day of the pool.



*Happy Wool Pool Manager*





## Pleasant Valley Farm

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**Parasites**... from page 3 commercial anthelmintics. My own flock had problems with resistance of parasites to the drug *Tramadol* during the 80s. Widespread routine use of chemical anthelmintics has unfortunately decreased their effectiveness on parasites around the world.

#### Treatment Groups:

- **Group One – Control** – Lambs that were not treated (unless they exhibited clinical symptoms and I determined treatment was needed for their survival and then they were to be eliminated from the experiment).
- **Group Two – Crystal Creek** organic wormer (*Paratack Intestinal Cleanser*, at a rate of 2 tsp. mixed with water to make a 1 oz. dose)
- **Group Three – Garlic Juice** at a rate of 1 tsp. Concentrated juice diluted with water to make a 1 oz. dose. (This dose proved effective but I would like to study the optimum dose further)
- **Group Four – Farmstead Health Supply** (1/2 tsp. *Sustain*, and 1 tsp. *Restore* mixed with water to make a 2 oz. dose) This mixture was too thick to administer as 1 oz.

It appears from my data that garlic juice reduces the numbers of eggs of *Haemonchus Contortus* and *Coccidia* in fecal samples. The results were unexpected. I have to admit I was skeptical about the effectiveness of any of the treatments. My first surprise from the samples was the lambs did not show any infection of

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*Haemonchus Contortus* (H. Contortus) at the May baseline testing session. There was only evidence of *Coccidia*.

During June there was a rise in both Parasites. The H. Contortus was mostly well below 2000 eggs per gram (not considered dangerous). The *Coccidia* was reading around 11,000 eggs per gram. The garlic treatment group dropped to less than 4,000 eggs per gram *Coccidia*.

One of the important results of this experiment is my own heightened awareness and understanding of parasite life cycles and the necessity of very careful management of pasture in successful growth of organic lambs. August and September are critical months and lambs may need to be monitored weekly or more often for H. Contortus. H. Contortus female may pass as many as 10,000 eggs per day under favorable conditions making it possible for one sheep to pass as many as 30,000,000 eggs per day.

Understanding this parasite's life cycle and the influence that the weather conditions have on it are important for parasite control and management. If the average period that first stage larvae need to molt into their second stage is 20 days, then it would be wise to rotate pasture every two weeks and not revisit a pasture for at least 30 days. I think that strip grazing may be a solution and an effective method of reducing infection. Lambs were all rotationally grazed

*continued on page 6*

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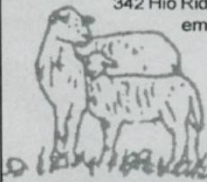
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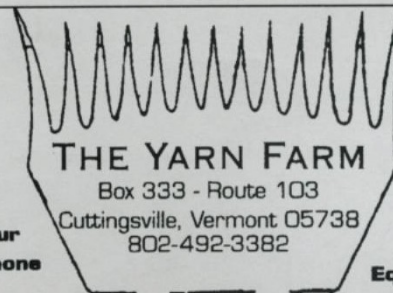
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4/05

Parasites ... from page 5

together and moved forward onto clean pasture "strip grazing" every day. Another fence advances the strip behind them. This year I am using flexinet. The solution to being able to raise healthy organic lambs appears to be dependent on a combination of natural genetic resistance, pasture management, health observation and selective immediate treatment.



Lambs are grazing a two foot strip of new grass up to portable electric fence.



78 Sunset Road  
Springvale, Maine 04083  
207-324-3733  
noon@gwi.net

Thanks to Jean for her effort in furthering our knowledge on organic parasite control. The full text of her work can be seen on the MSBA website: [www.mainesheepbreeders.org](http://www.mainesheepbreeders.org)

Jean is also hosting a workshop on **Organic Sheep Husbandry** at her farm on July 21st starting at 5PM. She will share her knowledge of organic sheep production. It is followed by a pot-luck supper. RSVP to Jean at 324-3733. FMI and directions go online at [www.mofga.org](http://www.mofga.org), click events.

Auction ... from page 4

Yearlings sold for about \$1.75 / pound and cull ewes brought about \$60 each. Sheep producers in Maine should consider this annual sale as a possible outlet for Easter lambs and cull ewes following lambing season. The sale is typically held on the Saturday, eight days prior to Easter. Mark your calendars for 2005 as Easter is Sunday, March 27th. Keep reading *The Producer* for the exact sale date.

**Thank Ewe**

Many, many thanks to all who worked to make the Fiber Frolic successful. I won't name names for fear of forgetting someone. It would not be possible without the collective effort of all the volunteers. Attendance was up to 2100 which is a 50% increase from last year.





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## Membership Notice

1993 ... You remember. It was the year that Audrey Hepburn and Frank Zappa died. The TV show Cheers ended its 11 year run and Michael Jordan retired as a player. 22 American soldiers died in Somalia. Gasoline was \$1.15 per gallon and a US stamp was 29 cents. 11 years ago, that is the last time that MSBA raised the membership dues. As noted in the last Producer, MSBA is seeing red. We need to increase our revenue to remain viable for the long term. The MSBA Board of

Directors has voted to recommend that the dues be increased to \$20 / year. This requires a vote by the general membership and will take place at the annual meeting, where you will have a chance to voice your views. MSBA works hard to support and be a voice for the sheep industry. Membership benefits include: wool pool participation, shepherd schools, farm tours, membership in ASI (American Sheep Industry), inclusion in the Producers' Directory, a listing on the MSBA web site and receiving *The Producer* newsletter. Almost all of MSBA's work is done by volunteers but everything still costs money. For example, ASI has doubled the dues it charges us this year to \$6 / member. It costs a minimum of \$213 to print and mail 1 issue of *The Producer*. You can't treat your special one to a meal for the price of membership in MSBA. The Board of Directors recommends that you vote in favor of the dues increase at the annual meeting.

7/05

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## Maine Sheep Breeders Association

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### **The Producer**

John Simmons  
285 Streaked Mountain Road  
South Paris, ME 04281

## **MSBA Membership Form**

Maine Sheep Breeders' membership is paid annually in June, either at the Wool Pool, or by mail. You will need to pay your dues by the end of the month of June in order to keep your membership active and continue receiving the **Producer**. If your membership has expired, just clip this form and send it with your \$10.00 to MSBA Treasurer...

Scott Gardner  
Gardner's 1797 Farm  
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Name \_\_\_\_\_

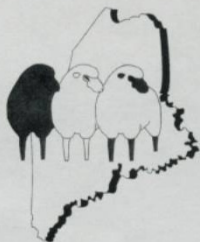
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Maine Sheep Breeders Association  
Stoneheart Farm  
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**Mark Your Calendars**  
**2004 Maine Shepherd & Goat Herders School**  
**&**  
**Annual Meeting**  
**October 22 - 23**

**WE'RE ON THE WEB**

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6/30/05  
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