

Roots Work

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"We want to show people that you can make money with a sheep operation," said Linda, a RootsWork board member.

The United States imports a great deal of cheeses made from sheep's milk like romano and feta according to the Faillaces. They hope to convince farmers that the quality and quantity of sheep's milk can be vastly improved by selective breeding.

RootsWork has offered them a section of pasture to keep a flock of 12 sheep separate from the rest of their flock in Warren.

These sheep, an American-type Dorset breed, will be artificially inseminated with sperm from a Belgian Texel breed (or "Beltex"). They hope to show how this cross-breeding dramatically improves the milk production, meat and wool of the Dorset offspring. The Beltex sheep - the only flock in north America - were recently imported by the Faillaces. The flock must be kept separate from all other breeds, and if the ram were brought into contact with the Dorsets, it would not be allowed to return to the Beltex flock.

"(RootsWork) gives us the opportunity to have this land separate from our own flock," said Larry.

Larry, who has a doctorate in animal science, said he believes himself to be the only person trained in artificial sheep insemination in the northeastern United States.

The Faillaces also are big proponents of rotational grazing. They move the paddock the sheep (and "Ollie" the guardian llama) graze in every two days or so. This forces the sheep to graze more evenly, and spreads fertilizer over a larger portion of land. They show before-and-after photographs of their own land which is much healthier and greener due to rotational grazing.

"RootsWork has a goal that is really more earth friendly," said Linda. "We're putting more into the land than we're taking away."

The sheep will be housed over the display garden this winter, and the soil will be "tilled" by pigs in the spring. Sheep manure is an excellent fertilizer and pigs are natural rooters.

Wade said RootsWork is waiting for various town grant applications to come through which will help with funding and he hopes to increase membership through a series of local demonstrations and fund-raisers in the near future. All interested parties are welcome.



David W. Smith of Montpelier is a regular contributor to The Country Courier.

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