



PHOTO: RITA BRHEL

An Industry Leader

South Dakota Sheep Project Earns National Recognition

BY RITA BRHEL
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Texas and California have long been the nation's leaders in sheep production. And while South Dakota's 2015 inventory keeps it in the top 10 states, South Dakota's 255,000 head is well below Texas's 720,000 and California's 600,000.

South Dakota currently sits in seventh place with Colorado, Wyoming, Utah and Idaho also ahead of it. That's not unexpected, considering that 80 percent of the nation's sheep are owned by large operations in these states, according to the 2012 Agricultural Census. Small producers, those owning fewer than 100 sheep, comprise the majority of sheep operations, although they own only 17 percent of the U.S. inventory.

What may be surprising, however, is that South Dakota has become a leader in the sheep industry in providing production education and spearheading growth in the sheep industry. The Sheep South Dakota Project (SheepSD) was recently recognized during the 2015 American Sheep Industry (ASI) annual convention in Reno, Nev.

"The sheep industry in South Dakota is an integral part of agriculture

production systems throughout the state," said David Ollila, sheep specialist with South Dakota State University (SDSU) Extension in Rapid City and sheep rancher near Newell, who heads up SheepSD.

"It is with great enthusiasm that SDSU Extension has placed a high priority on supporting the industry through efforts to help producers develop production program that will not only provide sustainability, but also promote an increasing number of sheep producers in the Northern Plains."

SheepSD, an educational pilot program designed by SDSU for new producers entering the sheep industry, was born out of ASI's "Let's Grow with twoPLUS" campaign launched in 2011 to grow the U.S. sheep inventory and stay competitive on the global market scene. Initially referred to as "2+2," Let's Grow urged producers to strive to increase the size of each individual operation by two ewes per 100 head by year 2014. Two more goals have

evolved out of the Let's Grow campaign since:

1. To increase the average birth rate per ewe to two lambs per year.
2. To increase the harvested lamb

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DAVID OLLILA

crop by 2 percent.

As part of the campaign, ASI has been distributing annual grant funding to state affiliates like the South Dakota Sheep Growers and the Nebraska Sheep and Goat Producers to develop educational activities and mentoring programs for new and expanding producers.

Many states have seen success in attracting producers new to the sheep industry and coaching them through the learning curve of the early years.

"People are hungry for information on how to raise sheep, how to be more profitable, how to raise more lambs,"

said Roger High, sheep associate with Ohio State University Extension at Columbus, Ohio, who is working on a multi-state project to develop a sheep business planning workbook.

SheepSD has also been receiving funding from ASI, to the tune of \$20,000 per year for the last three years.

Among SheepSD's offerings are a mentorship

program; webinars, shearing and sheep management schools, tours and evaluations of existing operations, post-weaning lamb performance evaluations and other activities to develop production and management skills; and creation of ranch advisory teams and ongoing learning communities among producers. To date, one learning community called Growing South Dakota Sheep Producers consists of 42 members.

SheepSD activities for 2015 will continue activities from previous years as well as add grazing schools.

"We're getting more young people

involved and promoting leadership skills for engagement in the local and possibly national level," Ollila said.

During the national convention, ASI leaders discussed the hope to replicate SheepSD in other regions of the United States.

"People questioned 2+2 when it started, but the dollars we have approved have been well spent and the industry is growing," said Stanley Poe, a member of ASI's Let's Grow Committee and a sheep producer near Franklin, Ind.

This year, ASI is making \$500,000 available in grant funds. Applications are due to ASI by April 15. Visit www.sheepusa.org for more information, or contact Alan Culham at alan@sheepusa.org or 517-896-7378.

"This is an opportunity to strike while the iron's hot," said Alan Culham, ASI coordinator of Let's Grow Campaign. He is also the sheep farm manager at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan, and a sheep producer near Webberville, Michigan.

"We're empowered to take the tools of productivity and put them into action," he added. "Let's use this opportunity to do some big things. Let's use this opportunity to make changes that will help us in the future."

Survey: South Dakota Farm Size Triples That Of The Rest Of U.S.

BROOKINGS — The USDA recently published the Farms and Land in Farms — 2014 Summary, which classified average farm size in the U.S. by sales class.

This 2014 summary showed the U.S. had 2.08 million farms. South Dakota had 31,700 farms in 43.3 million acres with an average farm size of 1,353 acres. This compared to a nationwide average of 438 acres per farm and a total of 913 million acres in farms.

"Farm numbers and size follow similar trends when compared to livestock and other operations, with numbers dwindling while size increases," said Alvaro Garcia, Agriculture and Natural Resources Program Director & Professor.

Garcia explained that the USDA classified farm numbers and land in farms in six economic classes by adding up sales of agricultural products and government program payments. These classes are as follows:

- Group 1 — \$1,000-\$9,999;
- Group 2 — \$10,000+;
- Group 3 — \$100,000+;
- Group 4 — \$250,000+;
- Group 5 — \$500,000+; and
- Group 6 — \$1,000,000

"Between 2013 and 2014 the only group that declined in numbers was group 1 with all others increasing," Garcia said.

He went on to explain that groups 3 and 5 had the largest increases at 1.4 percent and 3.6 percent, respectively. "The majority of farms in the U.S. are smaller operations," he said, noting that 51 percent of all farms in the U.S. fall into group 1 with 80 percent included within groups 1 and 2.

"There are slightly over 1 million farms in group 1. When group 2 is combined with 1 the number climbs to 1.66 million," he said. "Groups 3 through 6 on the other hand constitute only 19.6 percent of the total."

Average acres farmed by each group are as follows:

- Group 1 — 86 acres;
- Group 2 — 312 acres;
- Group 3 — 889 acres;
- Group 4 — 1,290 acres;
- Group 5 — 1,887 acres; and
- Group 6 — 2,655 acres.

"One additional interesting figure is the change in acres in farms by the different groups. Groups 5 and 6 increased their acreage significantly. Groups 1 and 3 had the largest reductions with negative 4.5 percent and negative 1.5 percent, respectively," Garcia said. "Interestingly enough, there were negligible changes for groups 2 and 4 of less than negative 0.01 percent."

WHAT THIS SAYS ABOUT SOUTH DAKOTA'S FARMS

"South Dakota is clearly an agricultural state, farm size triples that of the rest of the U.S. with one farm every 25 people compared to one every 154 for the nation," Garcia said.

Garcia summarizes South Dakota results of the survey below:

- Group 1 had 8,300 farms (26.1 percent of the total), had 1.2 million acres in farms, with a farm size on average of 145 acres. This group decreased

by 6.7 percent since last year with acres per farm remaining almost unchanged.

- Group 2 had 9,700 farms (30.6 percent of the total) during 2014, with 5.1 million acres in farms, and an average farm size of 526 acres. "Group 2 in South Dakota had 68.6 percent more land per operation for the same amount of sales compared to the rest of the country. In spite of this "apparent inefficiency," this group however increased farm numbers by 2.1 percent since 2013," Garcia said.

- Group 3 with 4,400 farms (13.9 percent of the total) showed a retraction (-2.2 percent) in numbers from the year before. This group has 5.5 million acres in farms with an average size of 1,250 acres per farm.

- Farms in Group 4 with 3,500 (11 percent of the total) dropped by 7.9 percent, had 7.2 million acres in farms with an average of 2,057 acres per farm.

- Farms in Group 5 with 3,300 (10.4 percent of the total) increased by 13.7 percent, had 11.2 million acres in farms and an average of 3,394 acres.

- Finally, Group 6 with 2,500 (7.9 percent of the total) increased by 4.2 percent, with 13.1 million acres in farms and an average of 5,240 acres.

"From this analysis, it can be inferred that in South Dakota it is again Group 1 (negative 6.7 percent) which has the greatest risk to its sustainability," Garcia said. "Group 2 on the other hand showed an interesting, encouraging growth since 2013."

In spite of South Dakota's larger operations, South Dakota farms that fit into sales groups 1 and 2 make up 56.7 percent of the total farms in the state.

"Oddly enough, it was the middle-sized farms that took the greatest hit in numbers. Both groups 3 and 4 showed quite a significant reduction with negative 2.2 and negative 7.9, respectively," he said. "Similar to the rest of the country, farms in groups 5 and 6 increased and were responsible for more acres farmed, mostly because more farms entered this group and not because of a significant increase in farm size."

Farms that sell less than \$10,000 in agricultural products have their sustainability compromised both in the U.S. and in South Dakota, explained Garcia. "These farms are roughly under 86 and 145 acres for the U.S. and South Dakota, respectively. On these smaller operations, sales may compromise the adoption of cutting edge technologies and the reaping of the benefits of efficiencies of scale," Garcia said. "Larger farms with greater overall sales are usually more attractive to the agricultural allied industry with increased technical support which entice them to farm more acres usually resulting in higher sales."

However, Garcia added, smaller operations, like those in groups 1 and 2 combined still constitute one-third (31.1 percent) of all U.S. farmland, and more than 80 percent of U.S. farms.

"This makes Group 1 and 2 farms a significant group for U.S. agriculture. South Dakota also shows the relevance of these two groups which combined represent a relatively smaller portion of the acreage at 14.5 percent but more than half of the total farms in the state (56.7 percent)," he said. To learn more, visit iGrow.org.

The Public Is Invited To A Reception Honoring
Yankton's 2014 Citizen Of The Year

Ben Hanten



1:30 p.m. Saturday, March 28

Yankton Elks Lodge

A Special Program Begins At 2 p.m.

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*This Special Event Brought To You By
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