



Herd the News

May/June 2019

The California Wool Growers Association will deliver lasting value to support and grow all segments of the California sheep industry.

2019 CA Ram Sale Averages Above Last Year

Sacramento, CA. – Composite rams, a combination of Texel, Columbia and Suffolk breeding, topped the 99th annual California Ram Sale with an average price of \$775 a head. A total of 393 rams were sold at the April 13 sale by consigners from Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, and California.

All rams averaged \$660 a head compared to \$658 in 2018.

This annual sale, hosted by the California Wool Growers Association (CWGA), is known as a source of quality sheep genetics for commercial producers raising market lambs and breeding replacement ewes. All rams are health and quality sifted by teams of veterinarians and sheep producers prior to the sale, held at the Porterville fairgrounds.

For the fourth year in a row, all sale rams were ultrasounded for loin eye and backfat. Together with ram weight, a Range Ram Index is calculated using a base value of 100 for comparisons. The index is confirmation a ram has the genetics to sire lambs with improved carcass qualities.

Highest indexing ram of the sale was a Composite consigned by Nancy East of Alturas, CA. The ram had an index of 123.0. A Suffolk ram sold by Mike Mann of New Cuyama, CA, had the second highest index at 114.5. Third highest indexing ram at 112.7 was sold by David Hansen of Fairview, UT. Matt Olsen of Spanish Fork, UT received the Best Consignment Award. Best Suffolk Consignment Award went to Kurt and Carol Heupel of Weldona, CO.

Sale consignors bringing rams with the largest loin eye measurements were East and Hansen.

High selling pen of the sale was consigned by David Hansen of Fairview, UT. The five Suffolk rams brought a total of \$5,875. A total of 393 range rams were sold at the auction, down from 2018's sale with 460 head. The 264 head of Suffolk rams averaged \$668, 75 head of crossbred rams averaged \$523, 32 whiteface rams averaged \$665, and 12 Hampshire rams averaged \$523. New this year were two head of Dorpers which averaged \$725. *(For additional sale statistics visit page 8.)*

Efforts by consignors to continuously improve the quality of the rams at this sale are appreciated by buyers, said Dan Macon, CWGA president. Those buyers understand they will be able to produce a better product for consumers with high quality rams, Macon said.

Contributions and the proceeds from the California Ram Sale support CWGA in its continued efforts to deliver lasting value to support and grow all segments of the California Sheep Industry.

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Presidents Message – Dan Macon



Dear CWGA membership,

I had thought I'd start this month's "President's Message" with something like, "It's been a busy month." Then I realized that there hasn't really been a slow time for any of us since I was elected CWGA President 10 months ago! I can hardly believe my first year as President is nearly over!

First of all, I want to thank the Ram Sale Committee for another outstanding effort! While total ram numbers were down slightly, the average price paid was up! We all owe a huge thanks to Dr. Wes Patton and John and Connie Olagaray for their leadership! I also want to thank Dr. Nancy East for once again leading the health checks, as well as Robert Carreiro, Phil Esnoz, Frankie Iturriria, and Joe Mattos, for ensuring we continue to meet the highest quality standards for our sale. And I also want to thank the many members who volunteered their time to make this sale a success – I especially want to recognize Joanne Nissen, Morgan Doran, Blair Summey, Lloyd McCabe, and Jim Neumiller. Susan Taylor once again managed the sale flawlessly. Finally, we couldn't do any of this without our Executive Director – we ALL owe enormous gratitude to Erica Sanko!

Next year will be our 100th Annual California Ram Sale – make your plans now to be in Porterville on April 18 to help celebrate this remarkable milestone!

Speaking of sales, we'll be hosting our third annual Online All Breeds Sheep Sale on August 1-2, 2019 – check out the website for details (www.californiawoolgrowers.org/calendar/online-all-breeds-sale).

Our Ad Hoc Labor Committee continues to make progress in addressing the wage and overtime issue. Over the last several weeks, members of this committee have met with a number of state legislators to discuss the impacts of AB 1066 on family sheep operations throughout the state. We are making progress, but we have a long way to go in resolving this issue. As you may know, we've hired the firm Kahn Soares and Conway LLC – George Soares has been working closely with our officers, committee, and staff to build support within the legislature and administration.

As you know, this effort isn't cheap. We also continue to work to raise money for our California Guard Dog Fund – we've raised \$70,000 to date. But we need more help – please consider sending a donation today! If you've already contributed (as I have), please consider an additional gift (as I have!). If you haven't yet contributed, any amount will help! And be sure to thank the contributors listed on page 3 of this newsletter – a number of individuals, organizations, and businesses have really stepped up – I hope you will, too!

Speaking of fundraisers, an anonymous donor has allowed CWGA to raffle off an ATV (or \$5,000 cash). Only 200 tickets will be sold – and they cost just \$100! Contact Erica to buy your ticket! And please help us get these tickets sold – let us know if you're willing to sell tickets. The drawing will be held at the CWGA convention in Minden, Nevada, on August 24.

Finally, registration is open for our 159th Annual California Wool Growers Annual Meeting and Convention! We'll be meeting at the Carson Valley Inn in Minden, NV, this year – on August 23-24. Come to the mountains and get out of the heat!

Friday's workshop will be "Improving your Flock's Wool and Fiber Quality." On Friday evening, we'll convene at the JT Basque Restaurant in Gardnerville for an amazing family-style lamb dinner. Saturday's membership meeting will feature industry updates, a research poster session, and our annual photo contest. We'll cap it all off with our Shepherd's Ball and fundraiser auction on Saturday night! The convention is a wonderful place to catch up with old friends and make new ones – I hope to see you there!

California Guard Dog Funds Received

The California Guard Dog Fund was established in 2018 to support and engage in legal and legislative activities related to sheep, livestock, and agriculture in California. It is the only Association resources devoted strictly to support and engage in legislative issues and litigation. Thank you to the following contributors:

American Sheep Industry Association

Ed Anchordoguy, Anchordoguy Lamb, Sebastopol, CA

Bob Beechinor, E & B Sheep Co., Bakersfield, CA

Robert Carreiro, Riverdale, CA

Central California Wool Growers Association

Cubiburu Livestock Inc., Stockton, CA

Florence Cubiburu, Stockton, CA

Ken Deaver, Deaver Ranch, Plymouth, CA

Nancy East, Sheep Rock Ranch, Alturas, CA

Ben Elgorriaga, Elgorriaga Livestock Inc., Madera, CA

Stephen Elgorriaga, Bonita Land & Livestock Co., Madera, CA

R. Emigh Livestock, Rio Vista, CA

Phil Esnoz, Shafter, CA

Richard Hamilton, Rio Vista, CA

Sharon & Ron Harston, Sebastopol, CA

Ryan Indart, Indart Ranch, Clovis, CA

Frankie & Renee Iturriria, F & I Sheep Co., Bakersfield, CA

Freddie Iturriria, A & F Sheep Co., Oildale, CA

Gary & Wanda Johnson, Boonville, CA

Kern County Wool Growers Association

Lempriere USA, Inc., Mt. Pleasant, SC

Dan Macon, Flying Mule Farm, Auburn, CA

Mike Mann, New Cuyama, CA

Joe Mattos, IOU Sheep Co., Visalia, CA

Lloyd McCabe, Barmac Farms, Dixon, CA

Susan Moranda, Ferndale,

Mountain Plains Agricultural Service

Jim Neumiller, Healdsburg, CA

Nevada Wool Growers Association

Joanne Nissen, Soledad, CA

John & Connie Olagaray, Five-O Ranch, Lodi, CA

Wes & Jane Patton, Glenn Land Farm, Orland, CA

PJ Phillips, Nissen Ranch, Esparto, CA

Dennis Pluth, Pluth's Homstead Ranch (Est 1882), Clearlake Oaks, CA

Kathleen Robidart, Round Timbers Ranch, Lodi, CA

John Ross, Alexandria, VA

Roswell Wool, Roswell, NM

Joe Schlitt, Wylecote Farm, Knightsen, CA

Andrée Soares, Star Creek Land Stewards, Inc., Los Banos, CA

Stackhouse Family, Montgomery Creek, CA

Superior Farms Inc., Sacramento, CA

Pete & Beth Swanson, Tracy, CA

Ray & Terry Talbott, Talbott Sheep Co., Los Banos, CA.

Utah Wool Marketing Association, Tooele, UT

Western Range Association

Welcome New Members

CWGA is very pleased to welcome the following new members to CWGA:

Brian Allen, Green Goat Landscapers, Morgan Hill, CA

Gregory House, Davis, CA

Burdell Johnson, Food and Fiber Risk Managers, Tuttle, ND

Austin Maners, Santa Rosa, CA

Emily Maners, Santa Rosa, CA

Jim Marek, White Bird, ID

Sandra Massie, Dayton, NV

Do you know a producer or industry stakeholder that is not a member of CWGA? If so, please share this issue of *Herd the News* and urge them to support their industry and join CWGA today!

Member News

Calling All Photographers

CWGA invites you to enter this year's Photo Contest. All photos will be judged together and voted on by attendees Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. Awards will be given to the top three winners.

All photos must be taken as a high-resolution digital photo and submitted electronically via email to info@woolgrowers.org. Limit of three (3) photo entries per person. **Entry Deadline: August 2, 2019.**

Renew Your Membership Online

For those members who prefer to pay for their membership online, electronic payments by credit card and PayPal are now being accepted on the CWGA website. To renew your membership electronically visit www.californiawoolgrowers.org/join/join-renew.

Number of American Sheep Producers on the Rise, California Numbers Decline

The U.S. Census of Agriculture, issued every five years, was released in April by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The 2017 Census of Agriculture highlights demographic shifts since the 2012 survey. It provides data on trends in farm size and consolidation and serves as a tool to help communicate the benefits of agriculture to local economies.

The Census of Agriculture included an influx of sheep producers since the last census in 2012. The current census shows 101,387 sheep producers in the United States - a rise of more than 13,000 producers since the last census. This is the first time since the 1969 Census of Agriculture that the United States has shown more than 100,000 active sheep producers.

For California there were 3,807 sheep farms reported. This is down over 400 farms from 2012. The majority of California sheep farms have less than 24 head, accounting for 70 percent of the total number of sheep farms in the State. The next largest group are sheep farms with 25 - 99 head at 888, followed by 155 farms with 100 - 299 head, 74 farms with 1,000 head or more and only 49 farms with 300 - 499 head.

Thank You for supporting CWGA!

From the Flock

A firsthand report from California sheep and wool producers.

For this issue we asked members about how shearing went this year and the quality of the wool clip.



Steve Elgorriaga
Madera County

For us shearing went well, we sheared anything that hadn't lambed yet in the middle of January, yearlings, and late lambers. We did not have to fuss with small lambs during shearing.

We received a better price for the early shorn wool, than we did for the wool that was graded and sorted, shorn in March.

We had our sheep in two spots for shearing in March and finished in two days.

Fairchild's Shearing Crew sheared 1,400 ewes in one, big day. We sorted the lambs off while the sheep were drying. The bucks we trucked to the corrals for shearing instead of taking the shearing crew to the rams.



Ryan Mahoney
Solano County

Our 2019 wool crop was a few mm shorter than last year, but beat last year's yield by 1.5%. Mircon and strength were right on par. We sheared a few days later than we would have liked because of the late rains, but the late rains really helped keep the wool clean. The filaree seeded out a week or so later than normal so the late shearing worked out fine.

The market for our main fine wool line was quite rewarding, however anything with a bit of VM seemed to really struggle. Recently the tariff issues with China has taken its toll on demand but it has really helped the competitiveness of U.S. sourced and processed American wool products. This positive won't translate into high prices for raw wool immediately, but it should be a quality boost for the companies that are invested in U.S. processing and the American wool brand.



Cecilia Parsons
Tulare County

What I am hearing from small flock owners is that it is getting difficult to find an experienced shearer and one that can handle large breeds. I've been fortunate to find a reliable shearer, but I need to make sure he has enough sheep to make the trip worth his while. I had more vegetable matter (foxtails) than normal.

To keep the shearer coming, make sure you are ready when he arrives. Dry, empty, corralled sheep. Power, level shearing area, protection from sun and wind. Someone to hand him the sheep, pick up the fleeces, sweep.

Shearing and Wool Resources

For resources on shearing and wool quality visit www.californiawoolgrowers.org/resources/wool-info.

A shearer directory is available at www.californiawoolgrowers.org/industry-contacts/shearer-directory.



ONLINE ALL BREEDS SHEEP SALE

August 1 – 2, 2019

Sale hosted by the California Wool Growers Assn.

Entry Fee: \$15.00 per head, \$20.00 per pen lot

Entry Deadline: July 5, 2019

California Wool Growers Association is hosting its 3rd Annual Online All Breeds Sheep Sale.

*The Sale will be held on **August 1 & 2, 2019***

Sale broadcast at susantaylorshowservices.com.

Ram Lambs, Stud Rams, Yearling Rams and Ewes of all ages & breeds will be auctioned off in the sale.

Online sale catalog including pictures and videos will be available on July 15th at susantaylorshowservices.com (click on "current sales").

Interested in consigning? Submit the attached entry form or enter online at www.californiawoolgrowers.org.

For questions contact the CWGA office at 916-444-8122 or info@woolgrowers.org.

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IMPROVING YOUR FLOCK'S WOOL & FIBER QUALITY WORKSHOP

Workshop hosted by the California Wool Growers Association

**Friday, August 23, 2019
1:00 pm – 5:00 pm**

Carson Valley Inn & Casino, Minden, NV

Workshop Cost \$25.00 ~ Registration Deadline August 16th

Please join the California Wool Growers Association at its 159th Annual Meeting & Convention on Friday, August 23rd for a workshop focusing on improving your flock's wool and fiber quality.

This workshop will address topics surrounding improving and marketing wool and fiber. Topics include feed and nutrition, how to have a successful shearing day, direct marketing to consumers, and industry efforts to improve the demand for U.S. wool. Presenters are industry experts on the wool industry. This workshop is open to ALL sheep producers, large and small, and industry stakeholders.



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for Wool Quality**

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2019 California Ram Sale Review

California Ram Sale OVERALL AVERAGES						
<i>Breed</i>	2019		2018		2017	
	<i>Head</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>Average</i>
SUFFOLKS	264	\$ 668.00	287	\$ 691.00	275	\$ 875.00
HAMPSHIRE	12	\$ 523.00	25	\$ 504.00	16	\$ 778.00
CROSSBREDS	75	\$ 641.00	114	\$ 626.00	124	\$ 747.00
BLACKFACE	351	\$ 657.00	426	\$ 663.00	415	\$ 883.00
COMPOSITES	8	\$ 775.00	3	\$ 525.00	6	\$ 1,925.00
DORPERS	2	\$ 725.00	0	\$ -	0	\$ -
WHITEFACE	32	\$ 665.00	29	\$ 614.00	26	\$ 569.00
ALL RAMS	393	\$ 660.00	460	\$ 658.00	447	\$ 832.00

In an effort to improve lamb carcass consistency and quality and increase production efficiency, CWGA developed the Range Ram Index (Ram Index). The Ram Index estimates the potential carcass merit of the lambs sired by range rams with superior carcass characteristics. When purchasing rams at the Sale, the Range Ram Index helps to identify the ram's potential genetic merit in passing genetic traits such as loin eye size or weight onto the ram's offspring.

The Ram Index is calculated using the following carcass characteristics: loin eye area (LEA), fat thickness (BF), and ram weight. These characteristics are given numerical values to measure the ram's genetic merit value relative to the other rams at the Sale.

The Ram Index is calculated using a base value of 100 for which comparisons can be made between rams with differing Ram Indexes. Rams with average carcass characteristics are assigned a Ram Index value of 100. Rams with a Ram Index over 100 (e.g. 110) will exhibit more desirable carcass characteristics (i.e. larger LEA, less BF) relative to the rams at the Sale. Rams with a Ram Index below 100 (e.g. 85.2) will exhibit less desirable carcass characteristic relative to the other rams at the Sale. There is potential economic incentive in selecting rams with higher Ram Index values.

California Ram Sale RAM INDEX AVERAGES								
<i>Breed</i>	2019				2018			
	POSITIVE INDEX		NEGATIVE INDEX		POSITIVE INDEX		NEGATIVE INDEX	
	<i>Head</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>Average</i>
SUFFOLKS	95	\$ 694.00	169	\$ 652.00	144	\$ 704.00	143	\$ 679.00
HAMPSHIRE	3	\$ 525.00	9	\$ 522.00	13	\$ 508.00	12	\$ 500.00
CROSSBREDS	51	\$ 677.00	24	\$ 565.00	78	\$ 629.00	36	\$ 620.00
BLACKFACE	149	\$ 685.00	202	\$ 637.00	235	\$ 668.00	191	\$ 620.00
COMPOSITES	8	\$ 775.00	0	\$ -	3	\$ 525.00	0	\$ -
DORPERS	2	\$ 725.00	0	\$ -	0	\$ -	0	\$ -
WHITEFACE	9	\$ 889.00	23	\$ 572.00	18	\$ 669.00	11	\$ 523.00
ALL RAMS	168	\$ 701.00	225	\$ 630.00	258	\$ 664.00	202	\$ 649.00

Thank You.... 2019 California Ram Sale Supporters

Thank You Ram Sale Buyers

Ed Anchordoguy
Anchordoguy Lamb
Sebastopol, CA

Bob Beechinor
E & B Sheep Company
Bakersfield, CA

Josh Brownfield
Orland, CA

Robert Carreiro
Riverdale, CA

Cubiburu Livestock
Stockton, CA

Florence Cubiburu
FC Livestock
Stockton, CA

Francisco Damboriena
McPherrin Damboriena Sheep
Company
Live Oak, CA

Stephen Elgorriaga
Elgorriaga Livestock Inc.
Madera, CA

R. Emigh Livestock
Rio Vista, CA

Joe Esnoz
Lost Hills, CA

Phillip Esnoz
Shafter, CA

Anna Estill
ALE Sheep Company
Gerlach, NV

Cole Estill
Estill Ranches
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Legislative Update

Court Dismisses CWGA Critical Habitat Lawsuit

In late March, Judge McFadden of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia dismissed the lawsuit *California Wool Growers Association v. United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)*, finding that California Wool Growers Association (CWGA) had not established standing to sue the federal agency.

CWGA, along with the California Cattlemen's Association (CCA) and the California Farm Bureau Federation (CFBF), represented by the Pacific Legal Foundation (PLF), filed the lawsuit in July 2017 in response to the USFWS designating 1.8 million acres of land in California as "critical habitat" for the Yosemite toad and Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog, two species listed as threatened and endangered, respectively, under the federal Endangered Species Act. The lawsuit contended that USFWS failed to consider (and mitigate for) economic impacts upon small businesses and local governments as required by the Regulatory Flexibility Act when it designated critical habitat for the amphibian species.

Unfortunately, the court never addressed the core question of the lawsuit—whether USFWS must account for such economic impacts under federal law—because it determined that CWGA, CCA, and CFBF members lacked sufficient injury to establish standing to bring the suit. According to the court, the economic injuries suffered by ranchers were not attributable to the Critical Habitat Rule itself, but instead were attributable to regulatory restrictions imposed by the US Forest Service and USFWS prior to the critical habitat designation.

There may be a silver lining in CWGA, CCA and CFBF's efforts despite the adverse ruling, however, in an earlier opinion in the case, the court found that critical habitat designations impact small businesses directly rather than merely regulating other federal agencies, as USFWS had argued. According to CWGA, CCA and CFBF's attorneys, that decision establishes favorable precedent that could be useful in future lawsuits challenging critical habitat designations under the Regulatory Flexibility Act.

While the decision is a setback for CWGA, CCA and CFBF, the three associations and PLF continue to believe that USFWS is subject to the Regulatory Flexibility Act and thus must consider economic impacts upon ranchers and other small-business owners when designating critical habitat. Should a more favorable fact pattern present itself, CWGA will again seek to go to court to hold USFWS to this legal duty.

Bills Introduced to Resolve Issues for Livestock Haulers

In a bi-partisan effort to address the issues livestock haulers are grappling with thanks to the restrictive hours-of-service rules, senators Ben Sasse (Neb.) and Jon Tester (Mont.) introduced the Transporting Livestock Across America Safely Act (S. 1255). The bill is the companion to the House version (H.R. 487) introduced by Rep. Ted Yoho (Fla.).

Specifically, this legislation:

- Increases the exempt air miles for livestock haulers from 150 to 300 air miles;
- Exempts loading and unloading time from the hours-of-service calculation;
- Extends on-duty time from the current maximum of 11 hours with greater flexibility;
- Allows drivers to complete delivery if they come within 150 air miles of their delivery point, regardless of hours of service to that point.

This legislation holds similar aims to rectify issues with not only the hours of service rules, but also electronic logging generally by ensuring ag and livestock haulers are included in the rulemaking process.

Gray Wolf Perpetrates Seventh Confirmed Livestock Depredation in California

On March 27, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) published a depredation investigation report confirming a seventh livestock depredation event by gray wolves in California. The depredation of two 2-week-old calves appears to have been perpetrated by a radio-collared wolf designated as OR-54; the prior six confirmed depredation events have all been attributed to the Lassen Pack.

On the morning of March 16, a rancher observed a wolf feeding on a calf carcass on private property in southern Plumas County. After running off the wolf, the rancher discovered a second calf carcass roughly 75 yards away from the first.

Personnel from both USDA Wildlife Services and CDFW were called to the scene and investigated. A physical examination revealed tooth marks consistent with a wolf attack and subcutaneous and muscle hemorrhaging, indicating the calves were alive prior to the wolf feeding on them. Based on the physical examination, eye-witness evidence and the fact that GPS data placed OR-54 in the vicinity of the attack that morning, CDFW confirmed the loss as a wolf depredation.

OR-54, so-named because it is the 54th wolf radio-collared by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, is thought to have returned to southern Oregon since the depredation, but is known to cover a vast territory. OR-54 has traveled through Siskiyou, Shasta, Tehama, Plumas, Sierra, Nevada, Butte, Lassen and Modoc counties, covering a distance of more than 4,235 miles since leaving Oregon's Rogue Pack in early 2018.

To date, CDFW has investigated 29 suspected depredations in Lassen and Plumas counties. Of the 21 not confirmed as wolf kills, two have been deemed "probable" depredations by wolves, eight have been labeled as possible or "unknown" wolf kills and the remainder have been labeled "non-depredations" or deaths from "other" causes. All reports are available at www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Mammals/Gray-Wolf.

Rancher Feedback Vital for USFWS Wolf Delisting Comments

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has extended by two months the deadline for the public to provide input on a proposed rule to delist gray wolves from the list of federally-endangered species throughout the lower 48 states, including California. The new deadline for submitting public comment is July 15.

The news of the extension came as a coalition of environmental activists, headed by the Center for Biological Diversity, announced that they had submitted more than 900,000 comments in opposition to the proposed delisting, a feat the organizations hailed as "the largest number of comments ever received by the federal government on an Endangered Species Act issue in the law's 45-year history" and which they claim signals "broad public support for continuing wolf protections." Another organization, the Endangered Species Coalition, has successfully encouraged almost 20,000 individuals to submit the organization's form letter in opposition to delisting to the USFWS.

Given the more-than-a-million comments submitted by environmentalists opposed to delisting, it is more essential than ever that the USFWS hear from ranchers in favor of federally delisting gray wolves.

Fortunately, the USFWS isn't simply looking for the loudest voice in this conversation—they're interested in hearing from stakeholders with the most relevant information. While environmental groups will submit more comments, facts are on our side. But it is essential that the Service hear your voice!

Public Lands Council has created a simple online portal for submitting your comments, along with some helpful pointers. To submit your comments visit - <http://cqrcengage.com/beefusa/app/act-on-a-regulation?o&engagementId=498904>.

While the proposed federal delisting is a step in the right direction, it is worth noting that federal delisting alone will not result in better management of gray wolves in California, as the species remains fully protected under the California Endangered Species Act.

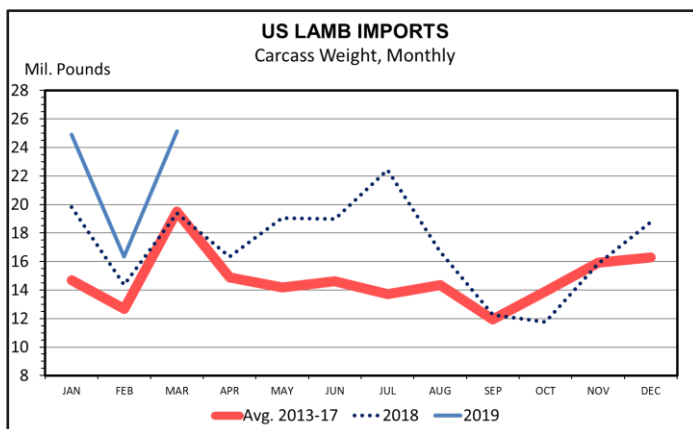
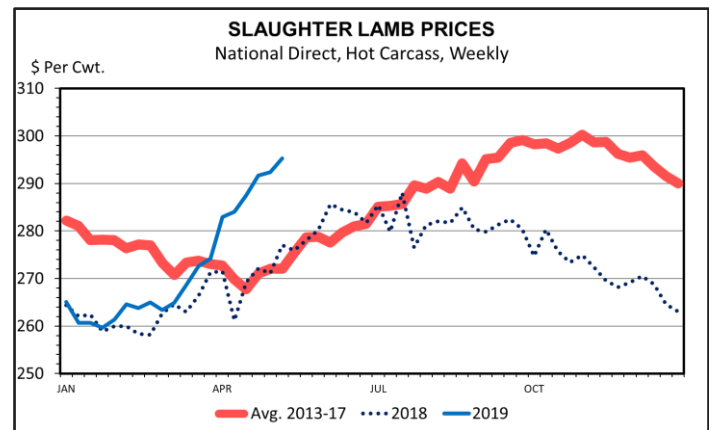
Lamb Market Updates

Strong Spring Rally in Slaughter Lamb Prices

Year-over-year declines in the number of lambs on-feed and quickly eroding frozen stocks of lamb have together translated into a strong spring seasonal increase in slaughter animal prices. In early May, the national weekly formula price of slaughter lambs was more than 7% above a year ago. If recent trends continue, the spring market rally will be much bigger than last years.

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) conducts a monthly count of Colorado's lambs on feed (the largest lamb feeding state). As of May 1, that survey showed dramatically fewer lambs in feedlots than a year ago (down about 49,900 head or -33%). That was the smallest May 1st number since 2017's and was the second lowest since 2010.

As of the end of March, NASS reported that frozen stocks in the U.S. of lamb and mutton were above a year ago (up 8.6%). However, the drop since the end of January was significant, falling by 19.0%. If the recent trend continues, frozen stocks at the end of April will be below a year earlier and could be at the lowest tonnage since 2013's.



U.S. imports of lamb and mutton are forecast to decline year-over-year, although tonnage was above 2018's for the first quarter (lamb increased 26%, and mutton declined 47%). Two factors are behind those expectations. First, even if drought in Australia persists, substantial flock liquidation in that country has already occurred which is likely to dampen their exports of lamb and especially mutton. Second, demand for Australian lamb and mutton by China has been increasing is expected to get an additional boost from African Swine Fever dramatically reducing Chinese pork production.

In 2017, the national formula slaughter lamb price for the summer quarter (July-September) averaged \$327.03 per cwt. In 2018, that price was \$281.87. This summer quarter that price is forecast to be above 2018's but below 2017's, averaging 4% to 7% stronger year-over-year.

Source: Livestock Marketing Information Center, www.lmic.info.

Demand for U.S. Lamb Still Climbing

Fueled by strong variety meat demand in Mexico and strong muscle cut growth in the Caribbean, the Middle East and Central America, U.S. lamb exports posted a solid first quarter. Exports increased 68% in volume to 4,173 mt while value was up 29% to \$6.9 million.

For muscle cuts only, exports were lower year-over-year in March, but first quarter exports still increased 25% in volume (659 mt) and 19% in value (just over \$4 million).

Source: U.S. Meat Export Federation, www.usmef.org.

Lamb & Goat Market Updates

Record Australia and New Zealand Lamb Exports, Yet Prices Hold Strong

Combined, Australia and New Zealand pushed a record volume of lamb onto the export market in the first quarter. Despite the increase in supply pressure and poor seasonal conditions, prices in both countries have remained robust thanks to strong global demand.

Lamb exports from Australia's principal competitor, New Zealand, recorded a strong start to the year. However, Beef + Lamb NZ estimated the 2018-19 lamb crop to decline slightly, to 23.7 million head, so high export levels may reflect dryer-than-normal conditions in New Zealand and fewer lambs being held back as replacements.

First quarter New Zealand lamb exports lifted 11% year-on-year and were 5% above the five-year average. Typically, New Zealand lamb exports peak in March but, depending on seasonal conditions, can remain elevated through to the end of May. Given the lift in exports in March, New Zealand lamb supply may have already peaked for the season.

Meanwhile, lamb-producing regions in Australia have continued to grapple with deteriorating feed conditions and water shortages, pushing increased lamb and sheep numbers through to slaughter. First quarter Australian lamb exports were up 19% year-on-year and were 27% above the five-year average.

Typical for this time of year, lamb prices have eased over the past six months. However, for both countries, the seasonal dip has been far less severe in 2019. The steady rise in lamb prices over the past six years, as highlighted below, is reflective of the emergence of China as a major buyer, growing demand in other premium markets and a weakening of both the Australian and New Zealand dollar.

Source: Meat & Livestock Australia, www.mla.com.au.

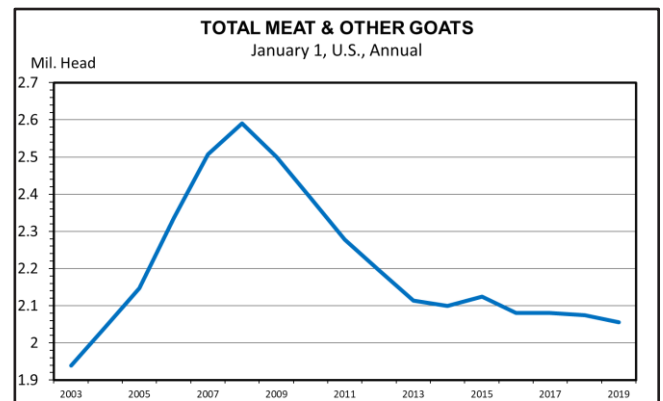
U.S. Meat Goat Trends

The U.S. goat market warrants attention, but total meat goat inventory has struggled to rebuild to the levels seen pre-recession. The highest meat goat inventory reported was on January 1, 2008, at 2.6 million head. Since then inventories have been declining and in the most recent five years have been close to 2.1 million animals. Some states have seen significant increases in their meat goat population. The Jan. 1 meat goat inventory by USDA-NASS reported year-over-year gains of 10% or in Arizona, Florida, and Washington. An additional six states had increases of 5% to 10%.

Goat slaughter has been on the rise. Annually, total commercial goat slaughter rose 3.3%, in 2018, which followed 2017's 3.5% annual gain. The increase was the result of more volume going through Federally Inspected (FI) plants, and less slaughter coming from other channels. Goat slaughter from non-FI channels declined 15% in 2017 compared to 2016 and was down 5% year-over-year in 2018. In contrast, FI slaughter was up 9% and 5% in those same years. Non-FI slaughter has been a significant portion of commercial slaughter in years past, falling in the range of 22-23% of commercial slaughter. The last two annual totals have been below 20%.

USDA-NASS surveys put total meat goat inventory levels slipping for the last two years. The number of market goats and kids as a proportion of the number of does reported as of Jan. 1 was the largest since the report began in 2006. This increase in kidding percentage could be pointing to structural change in the industry, through greater commercialization and larger flocks.

Source: Livestock Marketing Information Center, www.lmic.info.



Member Spotlight: Wooly Weeders

When Don Watson's best friend died from cancer in 1986, Watson became angry at God. He had grown up in California's Central Valley and intended to start a farm with his college buddy, Steve Peterson. They'd just need to spend a few years building their bank accounts. They were young. They had time. The two men married their college sweethearts and they all met often to discuss their shared plans. But those plans never came to fruition, and after Peterson passed at age 27, Watson and his wife, Carolyn, packed their bags and headed to Australia. There they hoped to find a new life — one with meaning and purpose.

"We just wanted to get away — start over," Watson said. "I had a vague idea that herding sheep might be in our future, but it was only a thought at the time."

In Australia, after a chance meeting in the outback, the American couple found themselves working on a remote sheep ranch and learning the trade. From that point on other opportunities led them to where they are now. Along with their son, Donny, and his wife, Stephanie, they are the owners of one of Northern California's most prestigious sheepherding companies. And like most businesses in the area, they've developed deep ties to the wine- and food-service industries. That, too, came from an unexpected encounter.

Meeting Mondavi

In the middle of the summer of 1991 Watson was grazing 500 sheep in a grassy, open parcel adjacent to one of Robert Mondavi's Oakville properties.

"We were careful to keep the sheep out of the vineyards because they'll eat the leaves and even the grapes if they're ripe," he said. "But somehow they got loose and got into what was a really nice-looking vineyard right next door. I was thinking I had a big problem on my hands."

Learning that it was Mondavi's property, Watson contacted their friend Holly Peterson (Mondavi's chef at the time) and offered to donate a couple of lambs as atonement. The winery agreed.

"So I delivered two butchered lambs to the winery kitchen at about 7 o'clock in the morning," Watson said. "There's this old guy sitting at the counter drinking coffee. He gets right up and helps me hang the lambs in the refrigerator and then offers to take me on a tour of the winery. I thought he might be the security guard. Later I find out that was Robert Mondavi himself. I had no idea."

Mondavi never mentioned the lamb-in-the-vineyard incident, but a few weeks later (after the grapes had been harvested) Watson received a call.

"Mondavi wanted the sheep back in the vineyard," Watson said. "They wanted them for weed control and as a natural fertilizer source."

Sheep "weeders"

When Watson started his handshake deal with Mondavi in 1991 the idea of sheep weeding vineyards was novel in California. Although the practice had been done for centuries in Italy and France, Napa Valley vintners had not yet widely adopted the practice. But since then, finding sheep grazing in vineyards has become less novel and is looking more and more like a good business decision. According to Watson, sheep can clear about 10 acres per day, and using other methods (humans, herbicides or machines) costs more. The practice also has positive environmental impacts.



Don and Carolyn Watson, owners of Napa Valley Lamb Co. "Wooly Weeders" stand in front of one of Clay Shannon's vineyards in Lake County.

A friend of Watson and another early adopter of sheeping was **Clay Shannon (CWGA Member), owner of Shannon Ridge Wines and Shannon Ranches**, a vineyard management company, which services Napa Valley wineries such as Clos Pegase, Girard, Cosentino and Charles Krug.

“Throughout the year the sheep are eating summer annual grasses and weeds, and then they start on the winter annual weeds and grasses. This process we call fertilizing with our wooly compost machines,” Shannon said. “Sheep have rumen in their stomachs that accelerates the breakdown of grasses and weeds and turns it into poop that’s scattered throughout the vineyard.”

According to Shannon, the poop is comprised of more available fertilizer than that of normal sources.

“This form of nitrogen creates a good slow release of fertilizer for the vines,” Shannon said. “This also leads to fewer pest issues, which means less spraying, fewer tractors, less diesel used and no tractor tires to compact the earth.”

Beyond the weeding and pooping, many herders have found that their flocks can also handle some more technical vineyard duties, such as “leafing,” which is typically done by human hands.

“Some years we put sheep back in the vineyards at bunch closure to eat the basal leaves in the fruit zone (to improve ripening of clusters) while the fruit is green and acidic,” he said. “The sheep will not damage the fruit (when it’s green). We call this ‘sheafing,’ — leaf removal with sheep.”

Shannon points to what he calls the ovis (Latin for sheep) cycle.

“The entire time these sheep are eating, making fertilizer and reducing the use of fossil fuels the sheep are (growing wool and) making milk to feed their lambs, which in turn feeds people,” he said. “This is a truly sustainable system.”

A lot of sheep need a lot of grass

By the early 2000s Watson’s herd had grown to nearly 18,000 sheep that “mowed” nearly all of Mondavi’s vineyards. But when the Mondavi Winery sold to Constellation Brands in 2004 Watson was in a quandary.

“We had a lot of sheep at that point,” he said. “We weighed the idea of starting fresh in Colorado. But in the meantime, where do you put them all? They still need to eat.”

But through another chance encounter, this time with Jere Starks, vice president of facilities and operations of the Sonoma Raceway at Sears Point, Watson found a way out of his dilemma. Starks, he learned, was having a problem of his own: How could he cost-effectively mow his 1,600 acres of hilly property?

“I met Jere on a plane while flying to Denver,” Watson said. “At that point I was paying about \$1,000 a day for extra hay, so things were pretty tough. When Jere asked when I could get the sheep to his place, I said, ‘How about tomorrow?’”

Wool, weeds, food and fire

According to Watson, the local demand for his sheep’s wool is on the increase, but he says currently the bulk of his business is split mostly between the work his weeders do and selling his lamb meat to Bay Area restaurants. Because the sheep are local and graze at organic locations, their meat is highly prized and has graced the menus of some of the area’s finest establishments — such as Berkeley’s Chez Panisse and San Francisco’s Quince — and has been a consistent addition to Yountville’s Mustards Grill since the early 1990s.



Don along with his son, Donny.

“When the lamb is of such high quality and is also this fresh it basically takes the experience to another level,” said Mustards Grill executive chef and partner, Michael Foster. “Having a relationship with Don for so many years, the restaurant has come to learn about how the lamb’s changing diet throughout the year can affect the flavor and texture of the meat. Knowing this, we can design new dishes that highlight not only the quality but are also dialed into the season. That’s just something you can’t get from products farmed from who knows where and by who knows who.”

Beyond the sheep working in vineyards, supplying quality meat to local restaurants and wool to local manufacturers, the biggest demand for their services today is coming from an entirely new direction.

“Fire control has become our No. 1 source of new business lately,” Watson said.

Writer and philanthropist Terry Gamble and her husband, Peter Boyer, own a 200-acre ranch in the Carneros region of the Napa Valley. For the last five years they’ve been using Watson’s sheep for weed and poison oak control. According to Gamble, when the 2017 fires hit the region, their land and trees remained relatively unscathed while other nearby structures and trees were lost. She attributes much of the success to Woolly Weeders.

“Initially we brought them on as a way to beautify the property and improve carbon sequestration of the land,” Gamble said. “But Don’s focus, even back then, was to highlight the benefits of fire control. And he was right. By removing much of the taller grass and bramble the fire was not able to spread quickly or reach the structures, but it was also unable to spread upward into the trees, which is what saved most of our oaks.”

A future of hope

Be it for fire protection, vineyard health or just to have the company of herd animals, clients of Woolly Weeders quickly become accustomed to the sight and sounds of the sheep as they graze or the occasional call of one of the trained Peruvian shepherders as they direct the dogs — primarily border collies and Great Pyrenees — that function both to keep the sheep directed and in a group and to keep predators such as coyotes, mountain lions and golden eagles away.

As we talked at Sonoma Raceway in Carneros the sun began to drift toward the horizon and the rolling green hills in the distance were obscured by the advancing fog. We watched as Donny Watson worked alongside Peruvian shepherd Adrian Estrella Espinoza and their dogs to lead the sheep to where they’d rest for the night.

Watson paused and took a deep and audible breath. In the distance the soft and comforting sounds of the sheep baaing echoed throughout the landscape.

“I’m no longer angry with God,” Watson said, turning his gaze skyward.

“You know the Bible verse Jeremiah 29:11,” he asked rhetorically, pausing only a moment before he recited the verse from memory: “I know the plans I have in mind for you, declared the Lord; they are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope.”

Source: [*The Weekly Calistongan*](#)

Did You Know.... White House Woolies

The sight of sheep grazing on the south lawn of the White House may seem unusual, but during World War I, it was a highly visible symbol of home front support of the troops overseas. The flock, which numbered 48 at its peak, saved manpower by cutting the grass and earned \$52,823 for the Red Cross through an auction of their wool.

Member Spotlight: Cuyama Lamb LLC

More than 400 sheep are currently grazing at the San Marcos Foothills Preserve to restore habitat for a number of bird species, including grasshopper sparrows; Western meadowlarks; burrowing owls, which live in old squirrel holes; and white-tailed kites, designated a species of special concern.

Once home to the greatest number of Santa Barbara County's grasshopper sparrows, the foothills below San Marcos Pass saw the ground-nesting birds' numbers dwindle to zero after cattle grazing ceased around 2008. Too much thatch, or fallen plant matter, had accumulated between the bunches of grass, which became thickly overrun with nonnative species like ripgut brome.

Channel Islands Restoration's Elihu Givertz, his team, and more than a thousand volunteers have been bringing native plants back to the county preserve, often through painstaking hand-planting. Now, to give native grasses a fighting chance, areas dominated by nonnatives are being munched by ewes brought in by Jenya Schneider and Jack Anderson of Cuyama Lamb LLC, which is part of Quail Springs Permaculture.

Givertz called the grazing project part of a "paradigm shift" among environmentalists, who have come to recognize the value of grazing species in habitat ecosystems. For the two-year sheep study, he selected 30 zones of differing characteristics, with a few control areas that are sheep-free. The theory is that by running 400-plus sheep for a day across an acre, they'll eat what's there, rather than what they prefer, and trample seeds and stems underfoot and into the ground before being moved the next day to the next acre.

Givertz and Mary Martin, a biologist with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, exclaimed happily when Schneider showed them four-inch native grasses sprouting greenly in a zone the sheep had grazed only the week before. Because the roots of native grasses are much deeper than nonnatives' — about 10 feet versus two feet — they

are expected to survive the sheep incursion and come back stronger than the nonnatives. "The soil is more alive," said Givertz, as the deeper roots support a cosmos of microorganisms, nutrients, and moisture.

Fish & Wildlife granted \$25,000 for the restoration effort, part of its Partners program with landowners to improve habitat. The flock of sheep is one part of Channel Islands Restoration's plan, which includes native plantings, seed collection and propagation, monitoring, and a robust volunteer program. The County of Santa Barbara contributed another \$21,000, with the remainder of the \$50,000 budget coming from donations to the nonprofit Channel Islands Restoration, Givertz said, in part from REI and the coalition that established the preserve.

The Rambouillet-Targhee sheep will spend about four weeks in the foothills before moving to their next assignments, an apple orchard in Cuyama and then some vineyards in late fall. They'll be shorn of their merino-type wool soon, and many are likely to have lambs in the fall.

By this time next year, Givertz hopes the cycle repeats at the San Marcos preserve, accompanied by even more birdsong.

Source: [Santa Barbara Independent](#)



Jenya Schneider praises her border collie after he herds the sheep from one pasture to the next.



Study Analyzes Contribution of American Lamb Checkoff Program



The American Lamb Board (ALB) works to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of their programs and ensure its efforts deliver a good return on the industry's investment. At least every five years, ALB conducts an extensive economic return on investment (ROI) analysis with a third-party University. The latest ROI study was recently finalized and is now available upon request.

The Texas A&M University 2019 report "Return on Investment in the American Lamb Checkoff Program" conducted by agricultural economists Gary Williams, Ph.D., and Dan Hanselka, aimed to answer two main questions: (1) what have been the effects of the American Lamb Checkoff Program on U.S. lamb markets, and (2) what have been the returns to the U.S. lamb industry from its investment in the checkoff program (the ROI).

According to the study, the American Lamb Checkoff Program has positively contributed to American lamb demand and industry profits. After extensive econometric modeling, researchers concluded that the American Lamb Checkoff Program added from 2.4% to 2.7% of the annual value of retail lamb. This 2.4% to 2.7% "lift" is the result of increased consumption of lamb and a more modest increase in retail price. The study reports that ALB promotion programs have helped increase the U.S. production share of lamb consumption to "some extent over time."

Another measure of checkoff program contribution to the industry is the cost-to-benefit ratio. The Texas A&M study reported that the average return to industry stakeholders for every \$1 invested into the American Lamb Checkoff Program is approximately \$14.20.

The researchers state in the report: "With modest funds available for promotion, the ALB succeeded in substantially enhancing the annual value of U.S. lamb consumed." The American Lamb Checkoff Program's promotion program is about \$1.5 million a year, with another \$0.5 million invested in education and research programs. Administration costs must be less than 10 percent of yearly collections.

American Lamb Board Background

The American Lamb Board (ALB) is an industry-funded national promotion, research and information organization (national checkoff program) that represents all sectors of the American Lamb industry including producers, feeders, seed stock producers, and processors. The 13-member Board, appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture, is focused on increasing demand by promoting the freshness, flavor, nutritional benefits, and culinary versatility of American Lamb. The work of the ALB is overseen by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The program is funded through mandatory assessments collected under the federally mandated Lamb Checkoff program. There is a live weight assessment of \$.007 per pound paid by the seller of sheep or lambs and a first handler assessment of \$.42 per head assessment paid by the entity who owns sheep or lambs at the time of slaughter. The assessments are remitted to the ALB. The Board's expenditures for administration are limited to 10 percent or less of projected revenues. All remaining revenues are expended on programs related to promotion, research and information for the lamb industry.

Checkoff Remittance Process

All sheep or lambs of any age, including ewes and rams, are subject to the national lamb checkoff assessment (all feeder and market lambs and all breeding stock and cull animals) at the time of sale. Each producer, feeder or seedstock producer is obligated to pay the weight portion of the assessment and pass it on to the subsequent purchaser ultimately reaching the first handler or exporter, who will remit the total assessment. If a person is both producer and first handler, they will be responsible for remitting both assessments directly to ALB.

For more details on how to submit your checkoff assessment visit www.lambresourcecenter.com/lamb-checkoff/checkoff-process.

Upcoming Inaugural American Lamb Summit Tackles Product Competitiveness



The first ever Lamb Summit, sponsored by the American Lamb Board and Premier 1 Supplies, will address critical strategies to improve our industry's product competitiveness and profitability. The two-day program is August 27-28, 2019, in Fort Collins, CO.

"Meating" the Needs of the New Lamb Consumer kicks off the event, with an in-depth discussion of what our customers and consumers need/want and how to deliver the value attributes for which they are willing to pay a premium. Next, guest speakers Dave Pethick, PhD, from Australia and Phil Hadley, PhD, from the United Kingdom, share what their lamb industries are doing to improve product value and meet customer expectations. The panelists will share insights on how farmers and ranchers can manage the relationship between eating quality and lean meat yield.

From there, the summit will turn to practical on-farm techniques to reduce fat content, improve consistency and overall quality of American lamb products through live-demonstrations at Colorado State University's ARDEC (Agricultural Research, Development and Education Center) Sheep Unit education stations. The first day will end with a great American Lamb BBQ and awards program.

Product quality and out-of-season lambing, carcass quality feedback, and traceability will be the focus of the second day. The panel discussion on out-of-season lambing will explore opportunities to improve the consistency and quality of American Lamb through increased supplies of market ready lambs from May to August. Practical topics such as costs of implementing to an out-of-season system and if financial outcomes allow for the switch will be thoroughly discussed.

The carcass quality session on day two will examine tools and technology that the U.S. lamb industry can implement to improve product value and traceability of value traits, and increase carcass quality feedback throughout the supply chain.

The American Lamb Summit will conclude at the new JBS Global Food Innovation Center at Colorado State University's Animal Science Department. Innovative educational stations will explore variations and preferences of American Lamb flavor, and the Rapid Evaporative Ionization Mass Spectrometry (REIMS) technology being tested to differentiate American Lamb flavor attributes at the plant and, understanding the grid and carcass targets.

This inaugural American Lamb Summit covers a vast amount of new knowledge that is all coming together to improve the opportunities for the US sheep industry. In fact, producers, feeders and processors were instrumental in research that led to this knowledge through its national checkoff.

"We hope this summit will inspire the next level of change and collaboration among all segments of the US lamb industry to improve our competitiveness and productivity through increased utilization of the most efficient, progressive management tools for the producer, feeder and processor," said Dale Thorne, ALB chairman and lamb producer/feeder from Michigan.

The 2019 American Lamb Summit is limited to the first 150 registered attendees and is expected to fill quickly.

For more program details, registration and the hotel block visit

<https://www.americanlamb.com/product/lamb-summit/>.

For questions or help please email Karissa Maneotis Issacs at karissa@americanlamb.com.

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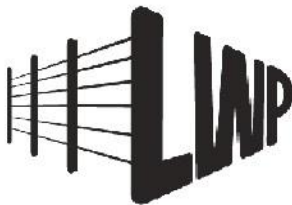
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Looking forward to speaking with you, Bill & Susan Shaul



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June 2, 2019

Humboldt Wool Growers Assn. Annual

Membership Meeting & BBQ

Fortuna, CA

June 9, 2019

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