

Lambs, wool facing stiff competition

DENVER, Colo. - Domestically produced lamb and wool are facing stiff competition from imports as well as other domestically produced meats and fibers. American producers are inviting this increased competition through any continuing decline in domestic production and the resulting higher prices. This was the message from Barbara Schlei, administrator of the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service. Administrator Schlei addressed ASPC delegates and directors at their 25th annual meeting held in Denver, Colo. on October 18.

Schlei pointed out that an increase in the ewe lamb inventory and decrease in the sheep and lamb slaughter would indicate that producers may have begun the "long-awaited rebuilding process."

Tom Vaughn, director of meat procurement for The Kroger Company, echoed Schlei's call for increased lamb supplies. The Kroger

Company is the third largest retail food chain in the U.S. with over 1200 stores.

In 1976 the Kroger management began a total lamb merchandising program, that called for determination of quality specifications, training of retail meat cutters, development of in-store lamb displays and determination of promotional direction.

As a result of the strict guidelines set-up for these areas, The Kroger Company increased lamb tonnage used by 132 per cent over the last three years.

Vaughn indicated that there is a vast and potentially growing market for lamb. He said that his chain provides positive proof that lamb retailers can sell whatever the producers are able to provide.

The Kroger Company has made a substantial financial commitment to their lamb program and are willing, Vaughn said, to continue that investment, if producers will work to

provide the necessary supply. "I urge you," said Vaughn, "to produce more lamb so that we have more lamb to sell."

A gradual, planned increase in wool supplies is needed to meet the current demands that have resulted from the tremendous resurgence in demand for 100 per cent wool fabrics. That was the message to U.S. producers from Walter Lichtenson, vice president of product development and marketing for Stillwater Sales, Inc.

Lichtenson challenged producers to correct the fleece polypropylene contamination problem. It results in greatly increased costs and reluctance by mills to use wool from areas with records of past contamination problems. He also implored producers to exercise their power to stabilize the wool market and multiply efforts to regain predator control measures.

A sheep industry situation report panel was convened

to discuss the state of the American sheep industry. In composit, these gentlemen agreed that the industry must increase production of lamb and wool even though there are some growth impediments.

Panel members pointed to difficulty in obtaining replacement ewes as a major stumbling block in increasing production. Other factors were labor and predator problems and government interference and resistance to growth in fear of adversely affecting the current favorable price levels.

The panel members also presented a strong belief in the future of the sheep industry and its impending strong position in the American marketplace.

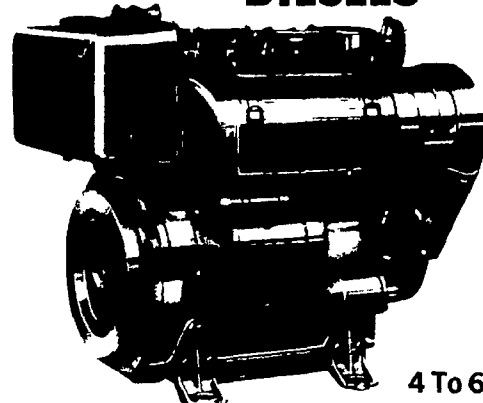
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