

The pros and cons of the ram lamb test

BY JACK HUBLEY
STATE COLLEGE — The principle behind performance testing is simple. Place a group of one species under controlled conditions eliminating all possible variables, feed a high quality ration, monitor each animal's performance, and the cream rises to the top.

Not surprisingly, the technique works and is accepted by beef, swine and sheep breeders as the shortcut to genetic improvement.

But performance testing is all that we say it is, why have only 47 rams been entered in the Pa. Department of Agriculture's Spring Ram Lamb Test at the Meat Animal Evaluation Center in State College, and why did Ed Barben, the program's acting director, find it necessary to extend the sign-up deadline to April 13, to obtain what amounts to little more than one-half the number of lambs deemed necessary.

At a total value of \$6,223,000, Pennsylvania's sheep industry can hardly be considered a heavyweight when compared to the state's \$63,900,000 worth of hogs, and its \$1 billion-plus cattle business. Nevertheless, with a state-wide yearly lamb crop of 80,000, a test enrollment of 80 ram lambs hardly seems excessive.

Some of the test's former participants feel they know the reasons for the performance test's low enrollment, and most criticisms fall into one of three categories: health problems, inadequate promotion, and poor prices received at the test sale.

"I've been up there (at the test station) during the summer and found the pens filthy," remarks Annette Menhennett, president of the Pennsylvania-Maryland Shropshire Association. "Because of the height of the waterers, they're always full of fecal material, and as far as I'm concerned, the animals' feet aren't cared for properly. During one summer, half the test was spent trying to clear up an outbreak of foot rot. The situation is unfortunate because the performance test should be the most important evaluating tool in our industry."

Joan MacCauley concurs with Menhennett's assessment of the health situation. Purebred Suffolk breeders from Atglen, Joan and Bill MacCauley have thus far entered two of their rams in the test. Mrs. MacCauley feels that overcrowding may have led to foot rot problems in the past, and cites disease and poor test promotion as reasons for what she feels have been substandard prices at sale time.

"Though we, personally, have never lost money," says Mrs. MacCauley, "we do know of a number of instances where people have actually had to pay after their rams were sold."

Dottie and Blaise Alackness, breeders of Suffolks and Targhees, from Roulette, in Potter County, aren't pleased with test sale results, either.

"When you have \$75 to \$100 wrapped up in a test ram, you're

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The first step in farm crime prevention, says State Police Trooper Romaine Edwards, is to install quality locks on all doors and windows.

Just how secure is your farm?

BY LAURA ENGLAND
LANCASTER — With 250 more acres of corn to harvest before the weekend's forecasted rain settles in, it was no time for the beater bar on the forage wagon to tear loose. So it's off to the shop with the wagon where the broken part will be welded.

A well-organized shop, you know

exactly where your arc welder is - safe and secure in the far corner of the building. But as you walk towards the corner, no welder is in sight. Quickly looking about the shop, you realize your welder is gone.

- The full moon should be out tonight, so you see no problem in leaving your tractor, intact with the baler, in the back forty for the night. The next morning, however, you realize that that was a mistake. The battery from the tractor has been removed and the tires on your baler have been slashed.

- Cow number 49D has finally come into heat. Not wanting to miss the opportunity to breed her, you rush off to your semen tank to

pull some of the \$135 per unit semen you have. Your written inventory list shows that five ampules should be available, but you can't find even one.

In all three of these cases, you have been a victim of farm crime.

Statistics show that incidents of rural crime, are increasing although the overall crime rate is decreasing. One reason for this is the increase in security measures, such as crime watch programs, that city residents are using to protect their homes and neighborhoods. Thieves are finding it easier to collect their wares in the less-protected rural areas.

"It's getting really tough for criminals in the city," said

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Low path depopulation begins in Lancaster

HARRISBURG — State Agriculture Secretary Penrose Hollowell and federal Avian Influenza Task Force director Dr. Gerald J. Fichtner have announced plans to begin eradication of all Pennsylvania poultry flocks previously classified as having the low pathogenic (LP) or mild form of avian influenza.

The decision to depopulate LPAI flocks was made by Assistant USDA Secretary for Marketing and Inspection Services, C.W. McMillan on Friday, April 6. The decision was based on recommendations from the USDA's Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee on Avian Influenza.

According to Hollowell, 48 flocks with 2.8 million birds were classified as LPAI flocks in January, based on clinical signs, epidemiology and laboratory evidence of infection. However, some have since been depopulated or marketed by the owners. The Agriculture Secretary estimated that as many as 2.2 to 2.5 million birds in 39 flocks may be depopulated under this phase of the avian influenza eradication effort.

Farmers affected by the decision have been contacted, and depopulation began on Thursday with those farmers who volun-

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Pa. FFA names executive-secretary

BY DICK ANGLESTEIN
ELIZABETHTOWN — William Erikson, who has a 24-year involvement with FFA including the past five at Elizabethtown High School, Lancaster County, will begin duties on July 1 as the Executive Secretary of the Pennsylvania Association of Future Farmers of America.

As his duties will begin in the new position, Erikson will share his time with half being devoted to that post and half as a continuing member of the vo-ag staff at Elizabethtown.

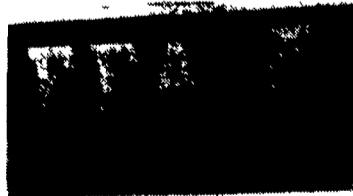
Erikson is chairman of the Elizabethtown Industrial Arts Department. With Al Martin as the other current member of the vo-ag staff, Elizabethtown is seeking a third member to join the department when Erikson begins his shared duties.

With his office remaining at Elizabethtown, Erikson's duties as Executive Secretary will be devoted solely to FFA activities.

Erikson sees the post of executive secretary as not one of making a lot of initial drastic changes, but perhaps one of doing things that haven't been done for awhile or bringing a fresh ap-

proach to FFA activities in the Commonwealth.

"One of the major areas of initial concern," Erikson explained, "will



William Erikson



be the coordination of all state FFA activities and events, as well as regional and national activities as they involve members from the state.

"As an example, he listed coordination of planning and preparation for the various contests and competitions in which FFA members participate from the local through the state levels and on to regional and national levels.

"I'm a firm believer in a policy that if someone goes through everything involved in these events, then it should be done right," Erikson said.

"If Pennsylvania sends a team on to further competition, that team should be the best we have to offer and the members should be the best prepared that they possibly can be."

In FFA competitive activities, he cited the coordination of such things as the proper completion and submitting of applications filled out by FFA'ers and assistance to make certain that various contests are properly conducted at the local level to try and improve the standing of

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