

# Pine Haven Farm Branches Out To Include Sheep And Trees

BY JOYCE BUPP  
York Co. Correspondent

HUNTSDALE — John Conaway has a philosophy about livestock merchandising. "Fifty percent of it is having something, and the other fifty percent is promoting it," says this savvy marketer of some of the state's most winning purebred Suffolk sheep bloodlines.

Conaway and his wife Dianne manage Pine Haven Farm, the Suffolk sheep and evergreen tree operation owned by her father, E. Richard Eberts. On April 18, Pine Haven will hold its first Club Lamb Connection Sale and an open-house in this lovely Cumberland County mountain valley setting.

The Eberts family purchased the property in 1967, adding a flock of some 20 Suffolk ewes soon after moving onto the farm. The following January, their first crop of lambs began arriving, and Pine Haven's flock started down the path that would lead them to the top of regional show competition.

Initially it began as 4-H involvement, as Dianne's project lambs proved worthy competitors in the show ring.

"In the early 1970's, they got serious about the sheep business," says Conaway. Not only flock size, but quality of performance came under scrutiny, as the family upgraded their purebred lines.

### Champion Bloodlines

As the accomplishments of the Pine Haven bloodlines became increasingly known in shepherd circles, outside interest was stirred. The first club lambs were sold privately about five years ago, performing well for pleased

project buyers. In fact, from that first group of six club lambs, one took the Centre County championship, and another was named reserve champion at the Farm Show.

As that trend continued, interest among buyers mushroomed. By the third year, prospective buyers were milling among the flock, writing down eartags before lambs were even near ready for sale.

For the past two years, Pine Haven joined forces with Hanover hog breeder Roger Bankert to hold a club project sale, offering both lambs and pigs, at the York Fairgrounds.

While breeder-held sale and open house events are commonplace in the large grazing areas of the West, few East Coast sheep producers have ventured into this method of merchandising. Along with the Suffolks offered by Pine Haven at the club lamb sale are selections from Buster Wilson Hampshires, Rural Retreat, Virginia, and Clearview Acres Dorsets of York.

Total consignments will number in the 25 to 35-head range. Along with the selection of club lambs will be a "handful" of breeding ewes. Sires of the Suffolk offerings include The Right Move and Zeigler Co 131. Hamps are from Gigelo, Nightrider or VVF 319, with The Priest, or Poynter Ram in the Dorset's paternal side.

In addition to the Suffolks, Pine Haven for a period of time also maintained a flock of Rambouillets. Those were sold last year

to a Virginia purchaser, since a greater return on investment was being generated by the Suffolks, especially in the demand for club lambs.

Now the focus is solely on the Suffolk flock of 55 brood ewes, 75 percent the farm's own lines. Outside purchases are mainly for fresh genetics through stud rams, including an E/T ram acquired from Rosenboom Suffolks in Clifton, Illinois.

Conaway's experienced eye quickly sees beyond the woolly exteriors of these tall, stylish, black-faced beauties to the show and developmental potential in their bone structure and muscling.

"We want lambs with the ability to grow efficiently, and to have muscle; after all, these are red meat animals. Soundness is important. There are a lot of unsound legs, feet and mouths around the country," assesses Conaway. "And, we need frame and bone, but not with as much emphasis as in the past."

"I believe perhaps size has been overemphasized," he adds, stressing the need for a "totally balanced package" in a lamb, including breed character.

Until packers move toward wanting 130 to 160 pound lambs, Conaway figures that 38 to 40 inches is the ideal size for stud rams. Packers currently prefer 105 to 125 pound weights, and price has been holding in the 88 to 90-cent area. Wool prices, however, have "tumbled," from past highs of 90 cents to more recent per-pound

lows of 60 cents.

Thus, flock profitability can be significantly boosted if club lamb demand is maintained. Conaway prescribes to the theory that show accomplishments, as well as publication advertising, keeps potential purchaser interest high.

"When you're winning, the

phone keeps ringing," he grins. And Pine Haven lambs have been on a winning streak for the past few seasons.

The 1987 Farm Show club lamb champ is the latest of a string of top prizes taken by Pine Haven breeding. Top wins of 1986 lambs

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Jeff Strausbaugh, pictured here with his family, took grand champion market lamb honors at this year's Farm Show with a Conaway-bred Suffolk sired by "The Right Move."

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