

# Lamb Marketing Study Results Announced

ORLANDO, Fla.— American Lamb is perceived differently by all key players determining its selling power, including producers, breakers, retailers and consumers, said Dr. Gary Williams, Texas A&M, who presented the results of a recent lamb marketing study here at the American Sheep Industry Association Annual Convention.

Texas A&M, along with the University of Wyoming and Colorado State University, jointly conducted the year-long study to assess marketing strategies to enhance monetary returns to lamb producers. A total of 140 key industry people, including feeders, packers, breakers, non-breaking wholesalers, retailers and food service groups spanning the entire United States participated in the study.

"Consumers are telling us they want smaller, leaner cuts of lamb, but producers aren't getting that message," said Williams. "We also have a whole set of consumers out there that don't eat lamb due to changes in ethnic base, that is, even though they're more ethnically inclined to eat lamb, they've gotten away from it usually because they have relocated to another part of the country where lamb is not as popular. It's a matter of the ethnic base that once supported our industry eroding because of today's less traditional lifestyle."

Williams added that lamb consumption also is affected by trends and right now, emphasis is on "light and healthy foods" which people mistakenly approach with

a diet containing little or no red meat.

On the retail side of lamb sales, retailers are saying they don't want to spend a lot of time making lamb more appealing to consumers by trimming excess fat and offering a wider variety of cuts as lamb volume is too low to warrant such attention to detail. So why not increase volume to up profit margins?

"It's not that retailers don't make money off the lamb they stock and sell," said Williams. "They just make more money off of other meats, mainly, beef, chicken and pork."

The key to a better lamb market, said Williams, is getting more people to eat lamb and getting the people who already eat lamb to purchase more. "We need increased consumption," said Williams. "The sheep industry should change the situation to where retailers need to carry more lamb. This in turn would call for more breakers to be in business which would result in competitive pricing. If that happens, prices to consumers come down while prices to producers go up because we're narrowing the price margin currently in existence where producers get too little for their products for which consumers feel they pay too much."

The bottom line, said Williams, "There is little wrong with the lamb industry that cannot be resolved by increasing consumption."

Steve Raftopoulos, ASI Lamb Council chair, agreed with Williams and touched on a variety of

solutions that should better position the industry to sell more lamb.

"We'll be emphasizing consumer education from selection to preparation," said Raftopoulos. "We'll also continue to urge growers to participate in the yield grade program so that we can show them they'll ultimately get paid for producing lean lambs."

Other key points, said Raftopoulos, include improved

merchandising/display/promotion techniques at the retail level that would put lamb in the spotlight; more focused education directed toward younger, trendy consumers who often have not even tried lamb; pre-packaged and processed lamb products to provide retailers with a variety of more uniform cuts tailored to change consumer preferences minus the cost and time of back-room preparation, and national coordination of lamb

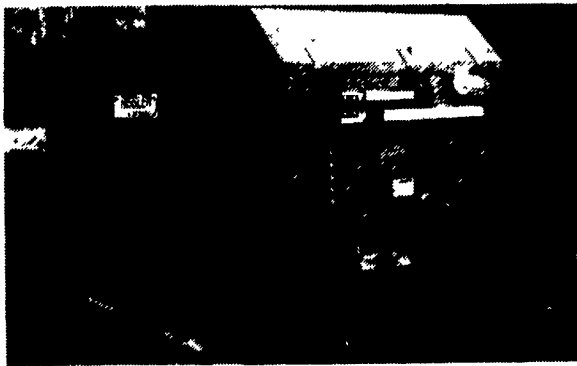
marketing activities to reduce the fragmentation of current marketing activities in the lamb industry.

"We'll also be looking closely at the food service sector," said Raftopoulos. "If we can offer a wider variety of cuts at lower prices, the food service industry could be a very powerful force in helping us prepare lamb in a number of ways that could appeal to all age groups, but especially the younger crowd."

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