

Progress, Potential Of Checkoff Programs Is Feeder Topic

CHICAGO, Ill. — Lamb checkoff programs were top-of-mind at the National Lamb Feeders Association annual meeting Jan. 19-21 in Albuquerque.

The sheep industry's only voluntary checkoff program, developed and managed for the industry by the National Live Stock and Meat Board, appears to have made significant progress during the past year.

Price is a high concern and is a barrier to achieving consumer purchases and demand, said the Meat Board's H. Ken Johnson, who spearheads the lamb program there. "We're in a situation where retailers can't determine the value of lamb. Several checkoff programs are addressing this aggressively," he said. Specifically:

- Revisions to the Uniform

Retail Meat Identity Standards, which assigns a uniform name to each lamb cut. "We can't track what is actually sold unless we call the same cut the same thing from store to store," said Johnson. These revised standards will be released this spring by the Meat Board, incorporating UPC bar codes as well.

- CARDS (Computer Assisted Retail Decision Support) computer software has been completed for lamb and is ready to market to retailers and packers. This state-of-the-art program puts dollars and cents to lamb value by combining product yield with labor costs.

- The Meat Marketing and Technology Center will open for classes in 1995. The curriculum and consulting aspects will be

managed by the Meat Board, with classes held at the prestigious University of Chicago School of Business. Top level retail executives will learn about how to make their meat departments as technologically advanced and with the same profit potential as the rest of the store. "This brings our Value Based Meat Marketing effort full circle," said Johnson. "It takes the meat marketing systems developed with checkoff dollars and

puts them into action at progressive, high-volume supermarkets."

Information programs targeted at consumer influences such as educators and nutrition experts saw substantial success during 1994, and will be even more important for the lamb industry in 1995, said the Meat Board's Johnson. "These influencers carry such a high degree of credibility with the consumer that they must be

part of lamb's marketing program," he said.

Johnson called specific attention to youth education programs, whose distribution increased seven-fold between 1992 and 1994. "The meat industry has gone from distributing 50,000 school kits in 1992 to 350,000 this past year. And we've become more sophisticated with how we get lamb's message to the consumer," said Johnson.

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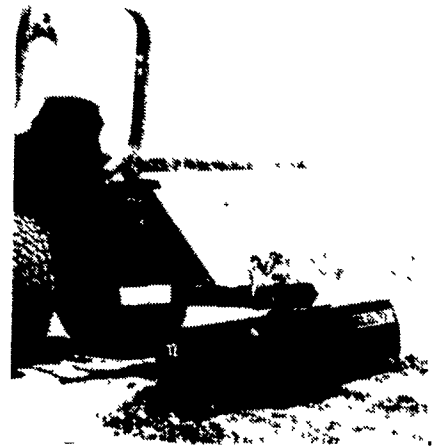
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