



# The Producer

*Maine Sheep Breeders Quarterly Newsletter*

FALL 2013

## Message from the MSBA President

What a summer! Too hot, too rainy, and now closing in on fall. Many of us did first and second crop hay at the same time (and very late at that). As some of you know, we have a new USDA Wildlife Services Director for Maine. Her name is Robin Dyer and she has worked here in Maine for a while. Please see the letter in this issue from her (p.4). She is anxious to get to know us and work with us on predator management. See also the article from Richard Brzozowski about the web based predation event tracking form (p.3). We hope to see Robin at some of our events. Please feel free to contact her and let her know what predator problems you are experiencing in your operation.

*Brant Miller, MSBA President*



## - Calling all MSBA members to consider serving on the Board of Directors -

Do you want to support the sheep industry in Maine? Do you want to work with sheep people for sheep people? Do you have about an extra hour or two per month? Why not apply to be an MSBA board member for three years? We will be voting in new board members at our meeting in November (see calendar on p. 7).

Please contact Brant Miller at [bsmiller99@gmail.com](mailto:bsmiller99@gmail.com) or 207-666-3270, or Nancy Webster at [woolweb@aol.com](mailto:woolweb@aol.com) if you are interested.

Dear Sheep Breeders,

Summer always seems to be so short and busy for anyone with a farm, a garden, or a business selling products to tourists. Hence, this issue has fewer articles than previous issues.

Nancy Webster has put together a nice overview of her sheep breed, Navajo Churros (p.2).

We have two reports from recent pasture walks and farm tours (p. 5, 6).

Our annual Sheep & Goat seminar and annual MSBA meeting is coming up on October 19. Details and registration forms are available on the U Maine Extension website <http://umaine.edu/livestock/sheep/sheep-goat-housing-seminar/>. This year's seminar will focus on housing and equipment. Our annual MSBA meeting and dinner will take place on the evening of October 19. Both events take place at the Kennebec Valley Community College in Fairfield.

What would you like to read about in future issues? What are the problems you encounter at your farm? What breed of sheep do you have, and why? Have you taken any pictures you were especially proud of, or that made you laugh out loud? Have you tried out any new products you like or dislike? I encourage you to contact me with your ideas and articles for this newsletter, pictures of your farm or animals you like to share with other sheep breeders, as well as your feedback, comments, questions, and suggestions.

Happy reading.

*Dorothee Grimm, editor*



## Navajo Churro Sheep

by Nancy Webster

Twenty years ago, on a trip deep into Navajo country, I had my first introduction to the Navajo Churro sheep. I had previously been raising various breeds of heritage sheep, Cotswold, Old English Southdown, Shetland, but as I gazed across the mesa at Two Grey Hills in New Mexico, I was struck by the small, sturdy sheep that, when moving as a flock, looked for all the world like an undulating Navajo weaving.

My interest grew as I spoke to the weavers at the Two Grey Hills trading post who took the time to continue my brief introduction to the Navajo Churro and in particular, their tragic history. At this time the little sheep were on the Endangered Species list and potentially near extinction. There were only approximately 1500 left in the United States and there had been a recent movement at the University of Utah to begin the Sheep Preservation Project with a plan to disburse starter flocks in different areas of the United States to, optimally, enhance and sustain the breed.

I knew immediately that I wanted to participate in the reclamation of the breed and learned that in Vermont, a couple had taken several of the sheep into a heritage breed farm and had a few sheep available for the project. On return to Maine I quickly contacted the couple and bought my first starter flock of Churro sheep.

Bringing them back to Maine was a journey in and of itself. Neighborhood farmers laughed both at the small size of the sheep, ewes weigh typically only 70 pounds, and also scoffed at the possibility of these desert sheep adapting to the harsh Maine environment. My farm community expressed little interest in these sheep and considered my experiment a folly at best and an eccentricity at worst. But as people rejected the idea that a small desert sheep could, and would adapt to the cold climate the sheep thrived and I became more interested and involved in the history of the sheep.

The Churro is an ancient sheep brought to the New World in the 1500's by the Spaniards. The Churro was quickly adopted by the Navajo due to their hardiness, double coated fleece and high quality meat, the numbers grew and the Navajo (Dine') people adopted the philosophy, "Sheep is Life". The Churro became the mainstay of the Navajo people with large flocks roaming the Navajo areas of the west.

The Churro is a double-coated sheep with long outer fibers and an undercoat of shorter fibers. The Churro fleece grows rapidly and is commonly shorn twice yearly and is genetically resistant to many sheep diseases. The sheep can

withstand austere conditions and have lean, excellently flavored meat. They are particularly hardy, can lamb in the field and browse on weeds and rough pasture. Their fleeces are still highly prized by hand spinners and the spun yarn is highly durable. Collectors highly prize the fleeces and the Navajo rugs and tapestries created from the Churro.

The history of these sheep brings clear awareness of the federal actions that served to control and decimate the Navajo peoples. These actions began with the forced Navajo relocation to reservations that negatively impacted the Navajo culture, weaving, traditional lifestyle, spirituality and self-sufficiency. At the same time, the U.S. government appropriated traditional summer grazing lands in the mountains of the west. The lack of access to grazing lands caused a number of problems including inferior wool, lower lambing rates, poor meat production and most tragically, devastation of the already fragile reservation lands.

During the severe drought of the 1930's, Navajos were forced to radically reduce their flocks – the wellspring of their good life. Government agents went from hogan to hogan, shooting a specific percentage of the sheep. First to be shot were the Churro because the agents thought this hardy breed was "scruffy and unfit". By the end of this genocide only about 450 Navajo Churro sheep existed on the reservation with a few in other locations.



*continued on p. 3*

*Navajo Churro Sheep**Continued from p. 2*

In the mid-1970 an animal scientist, Dr. Lyle McNeal of the University of Utah, recognized the genetic and cultural significance of the Navajo Churro and slowly, with the banking of sperm and eggs and with the dispersion of small breeding flocks to both the Navajo families and to interested outside families the Churro are making a slow comeback. Currently they remain on the endangered species list, though now they are listed as Threatened.



My personal experience with the Churro has been uniformly positive; they are foot rot resistant, easy keepers, lamb prolifically and easily, and produce beautiful fleeces twice yearly. They have adapted very well to the harsh Maine winters producing an increasingly dense and heavy fleece. However, to raise these little sheep, deemed “scruffy and unfit” by the U.S. government has brought me closer to the devastation of the Native peoples and a constant reminder that for the Navajo and for those of us very involved in the reclamation of the Churro, “Sheep is life”.

Nancy Webster,  
MSBA Vice President and Secretary  
Woolweb Farm, Brooks, ME

### Form online to track livestock losses due to predators

Falmouth, Maine - University of Maine Cooperative Extension is partnering with USDA Wildlife Services to offer a predation event tracking form for farmers to report damage to livestock.

The predation event tracking form is online  
[umaine.edu/livestock/related-resources/report-predator-damage-of-livestock](http://umaine.edu/livestock/related-resources/report-predator-damage-of-livestock)

USDA Wildlife Services will use the data to plan and implement effective control measures, and farmers and others will be able to receive annual reports of predator losses by county. The information could help farmers prevent losses through improved management and preventative measures.



The impetus for the predation event tracking form came from the Maine Sheep Breeders Association, which identified the need to help farmers report their losses.

Maine has nearly 20 million acres of forests and open space for wildlife to thrive in and these species play important roles in the ecosystem. Wildlife is wonderful, but some species can play a major factor in the success or failure of livestock operations in Maine. Farmers throughout the state typically lose poultry, sheep, goats, calves and other animals to both aerial and four-footed predators. These predators include coyote, weasel, bobcat, opossum, skunk, black bear, hawks and owls.

Predator pressure on livestock operations depends on several factors. Knowing the prevalence of predators - where they are and what they are attacking - can be key in minimizing losses.

For more information on predator management, contact USDA Wildlife Services in Maine, 207.629.5181.

University of Maine Cooperative Extension News Release  
August 20, 2013  
Contact: Richard Brzozowski, 207.781.6099

About University of Maine Cooperative Extension: As a trusted resource for almost 100 years, University of Maine Cooperative Extension has supported UMaine's land and sea grant public education role by conducting community-driven, research-based programs in every Maine county. UMaine Extension helps support, sustain and grow the food-based economy. It is the only entity in our state that touches every aspect of the Maine Food System, where policy, research, production, processing, commerce, nutrition, and food security and safety are integral and interrelated. UMaine Extension also conducts the most successful out-of-school youth educational program in Maine through 4-H.



## Hello, my name Robin Dyer

and I was recently appointed the State Director of USDA, Wildlife Services in Maine. Having begun my career in 1996 with this program as a Technician, I worked my way through each position: Technician, Wildlife Biologist, District Supervisor, and finally State Director. Throughout my career I've worked on every project and I'd like to share with you a brief description of those projects to inform you about Wildlife Services' capabilities and the assistance we can offer.

My first true responsibility was to manage an electric fence program, a program still in place today, which offers fencing for livestock and crop protection. It is a three year lease-to-own program with a cap of \$1,000 worth of fencing supplies. Upon signing up for the program, the producer must pay the first installment then an installment is due each year for the following two years. Upon the third year, the fence is owned by the leaser.

Periodically, we are asked to assist livestock managers in protecting their herd from predators such as coyotes and foxes. At times, trapping and shooting are necessary techniques used to remove the predator to protect livestock. Several trappers are stationed throughout the state that can respond to these requests and to offer suggestions to reduce predation through nonlethal means when possible.

Wildlife Services protects property, such as roads and farm lands, from flood damage caused by beaver. Suitcase traps are used to capture damaging beaver and remove them from the site. Hand tools are used to breach dams to lower flood waters when we can safely do so. Our staff will install devices called pond levelers should the landowner want to maintain water at a certain level. These devices aren't always suited for each location and a site visit by our experienced staff can help determine this.

Throughout the spring season, we have employees working along the coast to protect nesting Threatened and Endangered shorebirds. Their efforts are focused on removing predators which include foxes, coyotes, skunks, raccoons, mink, fishers, and various avian species.

We assist airports to protect the flying public from wildlife strikes with airplanes. Our employees remove mammalian and bird species that are found inside an airport's fence. We also conduct studies that identify species routinely attracted to the airfield. Upon completion of our study, we provide recommendations to the airport that they can use to minimize the attractiveness of the airfield. Annually, we provide training to airport personnel of almost every airport in Maine. Our one-day training session typically covers habitat management, wildlife identification and laws, and how to safely apply harassment and lethal removal techniques.

During the winter months Wildlife Services can be found assisting farms with controlling pigeons and European starlings that are consuming and contaminating livestock feed. A product called DRC-1339 is used in a controlled atmosphere to target these two species. Once Wildlife Services meets with the producer to identify if the product can safely be used at the farm, there is a week-long pre-baiting period that the farmer follows. Once we can identify that the birds are consuming the pre-bait, Wildlife Services will plan a date to apply DRC-1339 mixed on the same type of bait used during the pre-baiting period. Typically, this application removes the local starling or pigeon population that is using the farm as a winter feeding area.

Our expertise also has proven successful in protecting drinking water from being contaminated by feces of gulls and other bird species. This is a year-round project where our staff is patrolling Lake Auburn and harassing and/or shooting birds. Water samples reflect significantly lower bacteria counts when Wildlife Services is present.

Wildlife Services provides assistance to the public with birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. We can review a problem an individual is experiencing with these bird species and identify techniques that will help reduce the problem. Should these techniques not work and lethal control becomes the last resort to dealing with the problem, we then assist the individual with obtaining a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Depredation Permit. This permit is not issued without Wildlife Services recommendation form. Once an individual receives their permit, an annual renewal is needed to maintain it. This requires a consultation with Wildlife Services so they may obtain another recommendation form.

Our office hours are 8:00 – 4:30, Monday – Friday. We can be reached at 207-629-5181. Almost daily, someone is available to provide technical assistance over the telephone. For those interested in addressing a nuisance home and garden pest on their own, we can provide advice, mylar tape, scary eye balloons or loan live traps (on a first come first serve basis).

I will be attending events sponsored by the Maine Sheep Breeders Association and look forward to learning about your industry. Feel free to give me or my staff a call – that's what we are here for!

### United States Department of Agriculture

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service  
Wildlife Services  
79 Leighton Road  
Suite 12  
Augusta, Maine 04330  
(207) 629-5181  
(207) 629-5182 (fax)



*Safeguarding American Agriculture*

APHIS is an agency of USDA's Marketing and Regulatory Programs  
An Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer



### Pasture Walk at Collyer Brook Farm in Gray, ME. July 13, 2013

About 20 people showed up for the Pasture Walk at Collyer Brook Farm in Gray. Lisa and Philip Webster of North Star Farms in Windham are renting the farm to pasture a portion of their sheep flock. They gave us a very complete tour and explanation of their method of pasture rotation. Weeds are controlled by bush hogging every paddock after rotation of the sheep. Philip Webster feels it is very important that the fields are well maintained and look neat.

Ben Hartwell of 'Ben Fencing' explained how he did the fencing. He showed us a new piece of equipment to set posts and polywire from Gallagher called Smart Fence, 4 wires and 10 poles to go 330 feet long, 3 feet high.

*Diane Schivera,  
MOFGA Livestock Specialist  
Appleton, ME*



As a paid member of MSBA you receive this newsletter four times per year. Please make sure we have your correct email address/ mailing address on file. You are entitled to participate in the annual cooperative Wool Pool sale of fleece (at the Maine Fiber Frolic, see p. 5). You receive marketing and political representation at state, regional and national levels. You meet a great group of people who love to share information about their animals, their farm and their products, as well as information about breeding, management, and marketing techniques. Your MSBA membership makes you a member of the American Sheep Industry Association (ASI), and you receive their monthly newsletter 'Sheepnews'.

The MSBA board of directors (BOD) meets 6-8 times per year. We encourage membership involvement at the board of directors meetings, as well as on committees, and volunteering for one of our events and educational programs. Everyone has something to contribute. Please contact Nancy Webster or Richard Brzozowski and volunteer a few hours for the good of all. Maine Sheep Breeders' Association - by sheep people for sheep people.



**facebook** Join the Facebook group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/331285921205/>



## Farm Tour at Northern Exposure Farm in Dedham, ME. August 17, 2013



On a gorgeous summer day, about 20 people from New Brunswick to Massachusetts gathered at Jim and Janet Weber's farm to learn about their sheep, dairy, and experience with sheep diseases. The sheep dairy was established in 2009 with a flock of high percentage East Friesian ewes from Wisconsin and a ram from New York. Another ram from Vermont Shepherd was added this year.



Jim and Janet

The tour started at the lambing barn which had a concrete floor covered with straw, lots of windows to let light and air in, curtains on the windows allowing for the barn to be closed up during winter storms, hydrants for water (no frozen hoses or schlepping water buckets in the winter). During lambing the barn is subdivided into jugs using panels, 10 inch spikes, eye hooks and cork screw-like RopeLinks (from Premier 1).



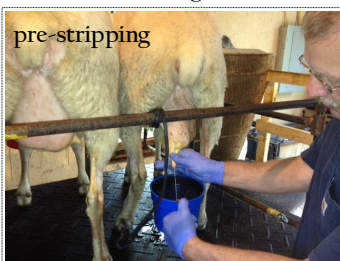
The second barn houses the milking ewes, when not on pasture. It has large openings, which can be closed with curtains during winter storms. On one side, hay bales are piled up for feed. Jim estimates one bale per sheep per week during the months they cannot graze. While feeding grain does not necessarily increase milk production the Websters feed their ewes grain during late pregnancy and through milking. Each sheep has two ear tags - a scrapie tag and a farm tag. The latter identifies each ewe with a number, while the tag color is specific for each year.

The ewes are bred in their second fall. Lambing happens in April. The lambs stay with their mothers for 30 days. After weaning the ewes are being milked twice daily through July/August, and once daily August through September.

The garage was transformed into a milking parlor. The ewes learn the milking routine in their first year. Once they get the routine, the order of ewes going into the parlor is usually the same - the same first ewe coming in, the same groups (often mother-daughter pairs together), the same last ewe. Six ewes fit on the milking stand at one time, two of them are being milked simultaneously. Preparations for milking include sanitizing all needed equipment, setting up an ice water bucket for the milk can (which allows for immediate cooling once



2013 lambs



pre-stripping

the milk comes out of the udder), adding a cup of grain to the feeders at each milking stand. The ewes are eager to come into the milking parlor, because of the grain. Jim and Janet recognize the ewes by their udder s, and they know what conformation they want to breed for. The teats are pre-dipped in iodine to sanitize and pre-stripped before the milking machine is attached. After detaching, the teats are post-dipped using a different iodine dipper, and the ewes are released. They currently milk 29 ewes in five groups; each

group takes 12 minutes to milk. Depending on the season and the individual, a ewe can yield between 1.5lb and 7lb milk per day.

In 2011 the farm was certified to sell the sheep milk. Jim and Janet sell the milk frozen in 5gal bags in pails to licensed cheese makers.



Unlike cow milk, sheep milk is still usable for cheese making after being frozen, due to its different chemical structure. This makes it easier for the cheese makers to make a larger batch every once in a while, rather than making a small batch every other day. The frozen milk keeps for about 6 months in their walk in freezer which is right off the milking parlor.

Northern Exposure Farm is part of the voluntary Federal Scrapie program. Each breeding ewe and ram is genetically tested for Scrapie resistance genes. The farm has not had any clinical cases of contagious foot rot, caseous lymphadenitis, or ovine progressive pneumonia. During their first summer, the farm lost several sheep to internal parasites. Since they now follow an intensive practice of testing each sheep for worms, selecting replacements for resilience, and rotating pastures to minimize exposure.

The farm has not had a positive counts of internal parasites since 2010.



entering the milking parlor



milking

Dorothee Grimm, editor  
Scarborough, ME

This farm tour was co-hosted by MESAS (Maine Sustainable Agriculture Society) and MSBA. MESAS executive director Andrew Files was present and gave an overview over the group's mission. <http://mesas.org/home.html>

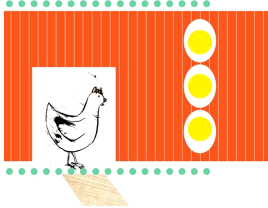
## MSBA Calendar of Events and Board of Directors (BOD) Meetings 2013

**September 5-8:** Fiber College of Maine, Searsport, ME. More information at [www.fibercollege.org](http://www.fibercollege.org)

**September 20-22:** Common Ground Fair, Unity, ME. Details at [www.mofga.org](http://www.mofga.org)  
 Sheep events include talks by MSBA board members Nancy Webster and Joe Miller, as well as the Fleece Tent, Fiber Marketplace, and Wednesday Spinners Tent. Contact Penelope Olson at [mizoly@midcoast.com](mailto:mizoly@midcoast.com) for more information.



**September 24:** BOD meeting via conference call. Phone number will be emailed to BOD members prior to the call.



**September 28:** First Annual Maine Chicken Coop Tour. 10am - 4pm.

Along with chickens you'll also see honeybees & goats. Free, self-guided tour will bring together chicken enthusiasts while encouraging education, community and local food. Want to have your coop on the tour? Basic qualifying criteria include coop cleanliness, bird health, visitor safety and available parking for visitors. Visit [www.facebook.com/MaineChickenCoopTour](https://www.facebook.com/MaineChickenCoopTour) and contact [kitchens.sharon@gmail.com](mailto:kitchens.sharon@gmail.com) for more information.

**September 28-29:** 25th Annual Vermont Sheep and Wool Festival, Tunbridge Fairgrounds, VT.

More information at <http://vtsheepandwoolfest.com/>

**October 19:** Sheep & Goat Seminar to feature housing and equipment, with Professor John Porter, UNH, at the Kennebec Valley Community College, Carter Hall, 92 Western Avenue, Fairfield, Maine 04937. Details and registration forms are available on the U Maine Extension website <http://umaine.edu/livestock/sheep/sheep-goat-housing-seminar/> For more information, please call Justine Denny at 207.781.6099

**October 19:** MSBA Annual Meeting and dinner. 6pm at the Kennebec Valley Community College, Fairfield, ME. Dinner will feature lamb, prepared by Lisa Webster (North Star Farms) and her mother Linda Daigle. The agenda of the evening will include awarding of the Shepherd of the Year Award, and featured speakers. Details will be announced on the MSBA website <http://mainesheepbreeders.com/>

**November 26:** BOD meeting at the Great Wall Buffet, Augusta, ME. We meet at 6pm to eat; business meeting starts at 6:30pm. We will discuss events for 2014, and elect new board members (p. 1). All MSBA members are welcome to attend.

Please check the MSBA website and Facebook page frequently for updates to the calendar  
[www.mainesheepbreeders.com](http://www.mainesheepbreeders.com)



### MSBA Board of Directors

**President:** Brant Miller, Bowdoinham, ME; [bsmiller99@gmail.com](mailto:bsmiller99@gmail.com)

**Vice President and Secretary:** Nancy Webster, Woolweb Farm, Brooks, ME; [woolweb@aol.com](mailto:woolweb@aol.com)

**Treasurer:** Richard Brzozowski, Buckminster Farm, New Gloucester, ME;  
[richard.brzozowski@maine.edu](mailto:richard.brzozowski@maine.edu)

Donna Flint, Oak Ridge Farm, Sanford, ME; [donna.flint@maine.edu](mailto:donna.flint@maine.edu)

Jim Grant, Good Karma Farm and Spinning Co, Belfast, ME; [jim@karmayarn.com](mailto:jim@karmayarn.com)

Dorothee Grimm, Scarborough, ME; [dorothee.grimm@web.de](mailto:dorothee.grimm@web.de)

Cindy Kilgore, ME; [Cindy.Kilgore@maine.gov](mailto:Cindy.Kilgore@maine.gov)

Al Maloney, NEWAIM Farm, Waldoboro, ME; [newaim@midcoast.com](mailto:newaim@midcoast.com)

Joe Miller, Rivercroft Farm, Starks, ME; [rivercroft@dialmaine.com](mailto:rivercroft@dialmaine.com)

Diane Schivera, Appleton, ME; [dianes@mofga.org](mailto:dianes@mofga.org)

Philip Webster, North Star Farms, Windham, ME; [northstarfarms@me.com](mailto:northstarfarms@me.com)





MSBA  
Maine Sheep Breeders Association  
Dorothee Grimm  
227 Black Point Rd  
Scarborough, ME 04074



Navajo Churro  
Woolweb Farm, Brooks, Maine