



# The Producer

*Maine Sheep Breeders Quarterly Newsletter*

WINTER 2015

## Thank You!

*By Dorothee Grimm and Leah Hoenen*

Richard Brzozowski has been a member on the MSBA board of directors, serving as treasurer for several years. Due to changed job responsibilities, he can no longer serve on the board. On behalf of MSBA, we want to take this opportunity and say

Thank You.

You have been a tremendous asset to the MSBA leadership. You have been a member on the ASI (American Sheep Industry) Production, Education & Research Committee, and brought ASI money to Maine several times to fund education events such as the New Sheep Entrepreneurs Training. You organized countless shearing schools, Sheep & Goat Seminars, parasite talks, FAMACHA classes, wool pools, MSBA sessions at the Maine Ag Trade Show, etc. You've welcomed a number of new producers into the Maine shepherding community, providing not only resources to help them begin their ventures, but friendly, helpful support along the way, making yourself available to answer questions or steer people toward the best sources of information. The sheep and goat community has been lucky to have you as a great source of knowledge and enthusiasm.

We wish you all the best for your new position as leader of U Maine Extension's Maine Food System effort.



*Foto: maine.edu*

Dear Sheep Breeders,

We very much hope to be able to say "Dear Sheep and Goat Breeders" in a future newsletter. What do you think? Should MSBA include sheep and goat breeders? Please make time and come to the January meeting at the Maine Ag Trade Show in Augusta to discuss this important decision (see calendar p. 2).

There is some exciting news to share - we are now two editors of this newsletter. We hope you enjoy the following articles in this issue:

- \* Articles about different aspects of marketing from the recent Sheep & Goat Seminar (p.3-6)
- \* Article about the newly opened Vermont Natural Sheepskins (p. 6)

We encourage you to contact us with your ideas and articles for publication in this newsletter, pictures of your farm or animals or products you like to share with other sheep breeders, as well as your feedback, comments, questions, and suggestions.

Happy Holidays!

*Dorothee Grimm and Leah Hoenen, editors*



## Calendar of Events and MSBA Board of Directors (BOD) Meetings 2015/2016

**December 8, 9am-3:30pm:** Estate Planning & Generational Transfer Seminar.

This workshop will help farm and forest product families minimize business succession risk and make informed decisions about intergenerational transfer of farmland and farm businesses. The workshop will address details on transition planning, retirement and estate planning, legal approaches to protect assets from taxes, tools you can use to transfer farm assets, and determining your goals to address transfer planning and business transition.

Cost \$20 (includes a fantastic lunch and handouts)

Location: Waterville Elks Club (upper level), 76 Industrial Street, Waterville

Minimum number of participants needed: 20

For more information and to register: <http://umaine.edu/agriculture/programs/transferring-the-farmforest-product-business/>

**December 12 & 13, 10am-4pm:** 6th Natural Fiber Showcase & Open House, A Wrinkle in Thyme, Sumner. More information at [www.awrinkleinthymefarm.com](http://www.awrinkleinthymefarm.com)

**January 12-14:** Maine Ag Trade Show, at the Civic Center, Augusta. More information at [www.getrealmaine.com](http://www.getrealmaine.com)

**Wednesday, January 13** MSBA meeting schedule:



5:00 pm Maine State Scrapie Board meeting

6:00 pm Welcome by the MSBA President

6:10 pm Sheep Experiences from Iceland: James Weber & Richard Brzozowski. The main focus of their recent trip to Iceland was on artificial insemination, but also included other sheep related topics relevant for sheep breeders in Maine such as ram selection, forages, facilities, management, sheep health, etc.

7:00 pm The Pros & Cons of MSBA opening to Goat Producers (MS&GBA): Richard Brzozowski facilitating

8:00 pm Adjourn

**January 27-30:** American Sheep Industry Association Annual Convention in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Lisa Webster will attend the state presidents' meeting and report back to the membership in a future newsletter issue.

Brant Miller will attend as director and report back to the membership in a future newsletter issue.

For more information and convention schedule, visit <http://sheepusa.org>



**February 22:** Submission deadline for The Producer's spring issue.

**February 23, 6:30pm:** BOD meeting via conference call. Call in number will be provided to BOD members prior to the meeting. If you would like to participate, please contact Gary at [garya@maine.edu](mailto:garya@maine.edu)

**March 5:** Beginner Level Shearing School, at Wolfe's Neck Farm, Freeport.

**March 9 (Wednesday), 9am-noon:** Ag Day at the Legislature, Augusta.

**April 15-16 (Friday afternoon and Saturday):** Blade Shearing School with Kevin Ford at Sabbathday Lake Shaker Village, New Gloucester. Limit of ten participants.

**May 20-22:** New England Livestock Exhibition (NELE), Windsor Fairgrounds, Windsor. More information at <http://www.northeastlivestockexpo.com/>

**June 4-5:** Maine Fiber Frolic, Windsor Fairgrounds, Windsor. More information at <http://www.fiberfrolic.com/>

**July 24:** Open Farm Day, statewide.

**September 23-25:** Common Ground Fair, Unity.

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

## A Few Tips on Marketing Fiber

By Wendy Pieh

Even in today's technologically sophisticated climate, the most effective form of marketing is word of mouth. And, especially with fiber, people want to see it and feel it. Whether it is wool, angora, mohair, alpaca, llama, yak, cashmere, or camel, the fiber comes in varying qualities and has different uses. That means it can help your sales if you can go to fairs, markets, and other venues where the customer can get to know your product directly.

We can't all go to open venues every weekend and have all of our potential customers experience our fiber directly. In today's world we have to go to the internet to spread the word about our incredible products. So,

- Have a web site
- Have a shopping cart on your web site
- Get a Facebook page
- Sell some product on Etsy
- Use other sites, such as Pinterest, Twitter, etc.



Customers like to know you; there is a thirst for an authenticity which has been compromised as we all shop on line and hope for the best. Customers want to get what is advertised, and they want to get it now. So,



- On your web site tell your story
- Put up photos of your animals and yourselves
- Show professional level photos of your product
- Provide ways for the customer to use your product, such as selling the yarn and the pattern to use it
- List testimonials from satisfied customers
- Accept credit cards, Square, Stripe, or PayPal or some other online charging service
- Send out the sale as quickly as possible
- Guarantee your product to be as advertised

You can spend a lot of money on a marketing consultant, strategy, and plan. On the other hand, you can follow your own intuition, set up a blog, or a Facebook page. I have a friend who learned to spin fiber, she sells her product on Etsy, and she can't keep up with the orders.

I would guess that most of us here got into the fiber business because we love our animals and we love fiber. I started from the livestock perspective, loving goats, and remembering that my mother taught me to knit when I was thirteen, so why not have cashmere goats? A whole new world has opened up for me, from micron diameters, to crimp, to length, to proper processing, and dyeing, to designing patterns, to setting up a booth at Common Ground Fair. We don't make a lot of money (yet!); however, we farm and market our product as a family and I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Wendy Pieh  
Springtide Cashmere  
Bremen, Maine  
<https://springtidefarm.com/>





## Marketing Tips for Farm Business Success

*Presented by James C. McConnon, Jr., Extension Specialist and Prof. of Economics at University of Maine, Orono*

“Everything you do to promote your business from the moment you think of the product idea until customers buy your products on a regular basis.”

*Definition of Marketing, by Jay Levinson (author of Guerilla marketing)*

The process of finding out what customers want/need and satisfying those wants/needs in a profitable way.

*Definition of Marketing, by James C. McConnon, Jr.*

James McConnon started his presentation with these two definitions of marketing. He elaborated on ten tips for a successful business:

**Tip 1: Research your market**

Sell products and services that customers want! Learn as much as you can about your market. Set aside time and money to research your market. Develop a list of key questions to ask potential customers. Write up your results.

**Tip 2: Target your market**

Identify the customers you are trying to attract. Develop a customer profile based on demographics (e.g., Maine's population is getting older, and has a large proportion of low income earners, so price will be a decision factor to buy), lifestyle patterns, expectations (e.g., price, quality, service, product mix). Focus your marketing efforts on this target market. Sell products that customers want!

**Tip 3: Educate your customers**

Share background information about yourself and your business. Emphasize the key features of your products and services. Test market new products. Provide samples and develop flyers, brochures, displays. Consider placing Quick Response (QR) codes on displays.

**Tip 4: Price for profit**

Set profitable prices for products. Price for your target market. Stress quality and uniqueness. Be flexible in your pricing.

**Tip 5: Diversify your marketing strategies**

Don't "put all your eggs in one basket." Consider multiple pathways. Try co-marketing with others (e.g., sell and market your meat together with another farmer's mustard). Add value to your products/services.

**Tip 6: Market for quality**

Learn how customers define "quality." Ensure high quality of all products and services. Stress benefits of products/services to customers. Guarantee customer satisfaction.

**Tip 7: Practice excellent customer service**

Solicit feedback from your customers. Seek training for yourself and your employees. Develop a written customer service policy (60% of customers are there for the service and leave because of bad service experience).

**Tip 8: Connect with customers through the web**

Create a well-designed website and promote it widely! Use web-based tools to communicate with customers (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Blogs, Instagram, Pinterest, QR codes). Carefully manage your web-based tools (start small, unify your profile and branding, link everything).

**Tip 9: Create a brand for your business**

Your brand is what your customers know and believe about your business, and is your way of differentiating yourself from other businesses in the market place. Create your brand by finding out what is unique about your business that customers want, determining what the key benefits are of doing business with you, identifying what brand promises you've made to your customers. Once you've created a brand, use it on everything. Brand = reputation + sum of all customer experiences.

**Tip 10: Develop a marketing plan**

Create a marketing plan that reflects the ways you market your products and services. Key components to include are current situation, objectives, strategies, budget, action plan, evaluation.

## Sheep & Goat Markets and How They Work

*Presented by Bob Herr, Nix Besser Livestock, Narvon, PA*

Bob Herr talked about his experiences with sheep and goat sales at the New Holland livestock auction. Some of his talking points are listed below.

- \* Livestock auctions are a very competitive market. Prices are currently good
- \* At the New Holland auction are never enough sheep and goats, and less people raise them
- \* Goats for meat: Boer and Nubians sell best, completely white goats sell not so good. Must be healthy and good looking.
- \* Sheep for meat: Cheviot lambs sell very well ("little tanks"). Must be healthy and good looking.
- \* Dollars invested in meat goats are better spent than invested in any other livestock.
- \* Ethnic markets for sheep and goat: Out of season breeding is necessary to be able to sell animals at the right size at high price times (check ethnic holiday calendars for dates, desired size). In the US, the best feed, best genetics, best housing, best health are available, but the marketing is often better in other countries.
- \* The Somali community in Maine should be a good market for sheep and goat meat, but their buyers come to the New Holland livestock auction in Pennsylvania.
- \* The New Holland auction takes place every week; the second and third week each month yield the best prices.
- \* Current livestock auction differences: goats are bought by the head, sheep are bought by the pound.
- \* Market price reports are available through different sources: Lancaster Farming newspaper <http://www.lancasterfarming.com>, [www.ams.usda.gov](http://www.ams.usda.gov), etc.
- \* You can sell animals on your farm and allow on the farm slaughter for a premium price (check state laws!). This operation should be physically separated from the rest of your farm for sanitary reasons, e.g., change shoes to go from one place to the other. Best practice is to have the customer take the entire animal off the farm after slaughtering, incl. entrails (unless you are in the disposal and composting business).

For information on breeding to target ethnic holidays, see the NC State University Cooperative Extension's websites

<https://meatgoats.ces.ncsu.edu/marketing-economics/>

<https://meatgoats.ces.ncsu.edu/2015/08/is-there-a-market-for-goat-meat-in-the-us-yes-there-is/>

For tips on farm businesses, marketing sheep and goat products, etc., see the ATTRA website

<https://attra.ncat.org/publication.html#marketing>

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**Kevin D. Edmonds**  
Director of Corporate Sales  
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 *Chef's  
Signature*

### Goat Meat Wanted

Dole & Bailey, Inc. is a Woburn, Massachusetts, based distributor for restaurants in New England. They are currently looking for goat and rabbit meat, because there are not very many breeders in the area. They are willing to work with small producers too. So even if you only have few goats at a time to sell for meat, please feel free to contact Kevin Edmonds at [kedmonds@doleandbailey.com](mailto:kedmonds@doleandbailey.com) or 1-800-765-7872 ext. 745.

Please note that they are not looking to buy lamb at this point, as they have a very good supplier already.

## Online Branding and Marketing

*Presented by Tori Jackson, U Maine Cooperative Extension, Androscoggin and Sagadahoc Counties*

Tori Jackson emphasized a few of James McConnon's basic marketing strategies, before addressing online marketing specifically. Below are some of her key points.

- ◇ Create a well made logo. It can be pricey, but it is a good investment. A poorly done logo creates a bad first impression, which will be hard to overcome.
- ◇ Develop a web presence: create a well designed website and promote it widely. Your website is a great way to reach people and a sign of legitimacy. It can be expensive to start up, and needs to be updated often. It is best to start small. Unify your profile and branding. Link everything.
- ◇ Use web based tools/Social media to communicate with customers: Flickr, YouTube, Pinterest, Facebook, Instagram, twitter, LinkedIn, etc.
- ◇ Social media is about conversations, community, connecting with personalities and building relationships. It is not just a broadcast channel or a sales and marketing tool. Key principles: listen first, speak second. Authenticity, honesty, and open dialogue. Allows you to hear what people say about you, and enables you to respond.
- ◇ Facebook: use it to keep customers engaged with your farm; offer special promotions to existing customers; remind customers when products are ready. And use pictures. Focus on why your product is different (quality, new, unique), do not focus on price (if you can deliver on the quality, customers will pay). Create a connection with your customer by e.g., offering how to information (dyeing, spinning, knitting, preserving, cooking, making yogurt and cheese).
- ◇ Tori's example for a clever name, logo, branding, website was LocallyLaid Egg Company ([www.locallylaid.com](http://www.locallylaid.com)). She used this example to illustrate that people do business with people who believe what they believe. That people don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it.
  - ◆ Shared values: connectedness between society and local business
  - ◆ Mission: use buzzwords, e.g. REAL FOOD to target foodies and health conscious people
  - ◆ Likeable content: what you do is interesting = show pictures of your gear, your animals, your work; create trust = share some of the hard stuff you have to overcome to produce your product; share your story
  - ◆ Shiny objects: what makes you different (e.g., pasture raised chickens; strictly local distribution within x mile radius)
- ◇ Email: maintain a customer data base; use a service for polished look (e.g., MailChimp, Constant Contact); thank the customer for their business, announce upcoming events, special offers; ask for feedback; keep your message simple

## Natural Tannery Opens In Vermont

*By Sarah Scully*



Shepherds Sarah & Rick Scully have opened Vermont Natural Sheepskins, the first natural tannery for sheep and goat skins in the U.S.A. The facility uses a plant-based extract to safely tan skins. The resulting products are machine washable and long-lasting with a soft suede leather and finely finished hair or wool coat.

Sarah became interested in the prospect of natural tanning after experiencing health effects from chemically tanned skins. After talking with other small-ruminant producers in New England, she realized there was a wider market for a non-toxic tanning option. Sarah & Rick apprenticed in England with the inventor of the process, who developed and refined the method over a twenty year period.

Vermont Natural Sheepskins, located in Randolph, Vermont, is now open and has begun processing orders for the first 100 customers who pre-registered during the year-long startup period. New customers will be able to send sheep and goat skins for tanning starting in the spring of 2016. For more information please visit the website, at [VermontNaturalSheepskins.com](http://VermontNaturalSheepskins.com)



### MSBA Board of Directors (BOD)

Elected, re-elected, nominated at the BOD meeting on November 24, 2015.

**President:** Lisa Webster, North Star Sheep Farm, Windham, ME; MSBA@me.com

**Vice Presidents:** Brant Miller, Bowdoinham, ME; bsmiller99@gmail.com

Cindy Green, Houlton, ME; cindyggreen98@gmail.com

**Secretary:** Donna Flint, Oak Ridge Farm, Sanford, ME; donna.flint@maine.edu

**Treasurer:** Sally Farrell, Buxton, ME; sarah.s.farrell@maine.edu

Dorothee Grimm, Scarborough, ME; dorothee.grimm@web.de (appointed co-editor of The Producer)

Leah Hoenen, Windham, ME; leah.hoenen@gmail.com (appointed co-editor of The Producer)

Joe Miller, Rivercroft Farm, Starks, ME; rivercroft@dialmaine.com

Diane Schivera, Appleton, ME; dianas@mofga.org

Clare Thomas-Pino, Dover-Foxcroft, ME; clare\_thomas@umit.maine.edu

Gary Anderson, Orono, ME; garya@maine.edu (UMaine Extension; non-voting)

Cindy Kilgore, ME; Cindy.Kilgore@maine.gov (Maine Dept. of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry; non-voting)

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. 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 automatically 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 Donna Flint and volunteer a few hours for the good of all.

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

**facebook**

### Maine Sheep Breeders Association

### 2016 Membership Application

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_ **Farm Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mailing Address** \_\_\_\_\_ **City, State, Zip** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone** \_\_\_\_\_ **Website** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-mail** \_\_\_\_\_

**Breeds of Sheep** \_\_\_\_\_

**MSBA Membership Year Is January 1 - December 31**

**2016 Membership Dues \$20 per Year/per Farm, Payable by January 31, 2016**



**Make check payable to: MSBA Treasurer**

**Mail to: Sally Farrell  
1606 Long Plains Rd  
Buxton, ME 04093**





MSBA  
Maine Sheep Breeders Association

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Springtide Cashmere  
Bremen, Maine