

Montadale Regeneration Project: Progress Report

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The Montadale Sheep Breeders Association Board of Directors, in a history-making move, initiated the Montadale Regeneration Project at their annual meeting in 1997. This project was to involve the return to the roots of the Montadale breed with the crossing of Border Cheviot rams on Columbia ewes. The intent of the project is to expand the genetic base while keeping the current breed standards. This would also increase the availability of quality breeding stock, allow the breed to expand, and generate new interest in the Montadale breed.

From crosses of Cheviots and Columbias initiated in 1932, E. H. Mattingly of Missouri at last felt he had found the combination of breeds that would make the "ideal sheep." The Cheviot breed, long known for its hardiness, vigor, and vitality, along with its small head, clean legs, open face, and high yielding choice meat quality, represented essential characteristics of this "perfect" breed. The Columbia was a large-framed, robust, wool-type sheep developed from a cross between the heavy, coarse-wooled Lincoln breed and the large, fine-wooled Rambouillet breed. Of particular interest to Mattingly was the exceptional meat quality demonstrated by the Columbia breed when compared with most other wool breeds. He believed the Columbia crossed on the Cheviot would produce the type of lambs desired (Wilkinson and Murdock, 1996).

The Montadale Regeneration Project was also initiated, in part, by the concern about the probable undocumented introduction of additional Columbia breeding into the breed. This, along with the desire to expand the genetic base with out-cross potential and increase availability of and interest in the Montadale breed added to the Montadale Association's wishes to go forth with this project.

NDSU Involvement

In the fall of 1997, seventeen NDSU Columbia ewes of mixed ages were mated to a Border Cheviot ram which was selected by the Board of Directors and the breed secretary. NDSU's Columbias are held in high regard on a national scale. The Boarder Cheviot ram used was obtained from one of the most highly respected breeders of that breed.

Results

Results of the fall 1997 matings are as follows: Fifteen ewes produced a total of 28 lambs for a 187% lambing percentage. Two lambs were born prematurely and were dead at birth. The average birth weight of all the lambs born alive was 11.6 pounds. All lambs demonstrated remarkable vigor at birth. Included in the 28 lambs were four sets of triplets, of which three of the sets were raised to weaning by their

Columbia dams. Twenty of the 28 lambs born were ewe lambs which was fortunate. This provided an excellent nucleus of females for the continuation of the project. The average adjusted 90 day weights of the 26 live lambs was 100.8 pounds.

The ewe lambs from these matings were used in several classroom situations. They provided a number of excellent judging classes, for both the junior and senior livestock judging teams. They were also used as excellent examples in sheep production classes. In all instances, it gave unique chances to discuss breed development and the principles and theories behind the establishment of a breed. They also provided illustrations of the effective use of crossbreeding and subsequent heterosis obtained from crossbreeding.

A number of the lambs were on exhibit at national sheep events around the country. They created considerable interest at the National Montadale Show and Sale in Springfield, Illinois. They were also on exhibit at the Midwest Stud Ram Sale in Sedalia, Missouri, the largest purebred sheep sale on the North American continent.

Future Projections

All ewe lambs from the cross of the Border Cheviot rams and the Columbia ewes were exposed to a Montadale ram which was selected by the executive secretary of the Montadale Sheep Breeders Association. The results of these matings are eagerly being anticipated in April, 1999.

Reference

Wilkinson, R.D. and G.L. Murdock. 1996. History of the Mondadale Sheep. Fifty Years: From Dream to Reality. Montadale Sheep Breeders Assn., Inc.