

Texel Times

The newsletter featuring Texel Sheep – the breed with exceptional muscle development

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Pictured above: Texel/Suffolk cross sheep in Northern Germany.

The 2012 National Show and Sale!!

Welcome to the 2012 National Show and Sale! This is the capstone event for the Texel Sheep Breeders Society and is much anticipated all year long.

Please read the article on Pg. 2 about the development of a business that helps FFA and 4H kids acquire top-notch genetics and also arranges for artificial insemination. It is a new business model for the sheep breeding world and raises some very interesting questions.

Also look for a profile of Ron Erdman in our continuing “Get to Know a Breeder” section. Erdman has been involved with Texels since the early 90s and has been a constant presence at the National Show and Sale.

We are always looking for submissions - whether photographs, essays or articles related to the Texel breed. Thank you for your feedback on the Texel Times. As always, don't hesitate to contact me at breslaufarms@gmail.com.

-Kristin Pike

Could Artificial Insemination be the Future of the Texel Sheep Industry?

By Bob Adams

A close neighbor of ours, who is in the business of selling high end club lambs, recently got the attention of the national club lamb world. In the past few months, his start-up company, Progressive Genetics LLC, has invested over \$400,000 in stud ram lambs. Progressive Genetics is a start-up stud ram operation that sells semen and breeding services to club lamb producers and 4H and FFA members. Ram lambs have been purchased in a price range from \$18,000 to \$78,000. Progressive Genetics has a highly respected and very successful AI veterinarian, Dr. Tad Thompson, doing most of the AI work in the Midwest. The owner has also developed locations in Oklahoma and Texas and has experienced inseminators lined up to do the AI work in those states. Glenn Erickson, located in Utah, is a very experienced inseminator and will be doing on-site insemination across the US. The owner of Progressive Genetics has been doing AI, flushing and embryo transfer work for himself for a few years. He has had much success using fresh semen. Presently he is offering frozen semen as well as fresh semen.

His endeavor has created a lot of conversation in the club lamb business, since it is the first to offer semen *and* arrangements

for artificial insemination. His website can be found at www.progressivegenetics.com.

Club lambs are selling at record prices right now. Just recently a wether sold for \$17,000 and there is talk that one brought \$20,000, here in Indiana. The on-line auctions have changed the means of marketing rams, ewes and show lambs, just as it did in the hog industry. As an auctioneer, with over 50 years of experience, I have a natural suspicion of some of those "on line" auctions, but at the same time I know some of the buyers and sellers personally and know they would not participate in anything that is not upstanding or ethical.

There are a lot of highly intelligent people in the club lamb industry, that see artificial insemination as the way of the future for a lot of club lamb producers - as well as for kids wanting to raise and show their own club lambs but cannot afford to buy an outstanding ram. Many of us can remember how the club pig industry evolved by AI and how top end boars sold in the \$100,000 to \$200,000 range. In doing so it brought a lot of boars into the \$10,000 to \$50,000 range. No doubt the aggressiveness of Progressive Genetics is going to increase the price of

outstanding stud rams in the club lamb industry.

Will it work? There are some highly respected people in the sheep industry that think it will work and there are others that think it won't work. The conversations that evolved in the Sheep forum, on Breeders World, were very interesting to follow when Progressive Genetics started putting its program together. AI worked in the club pig industry but artificially inseminating a sow is a lot easier. With a little training almost anyone can inseminate a sow. Inseminating sheep is a lot different. In the US, inseminating sheep by the laparoscopic method (LAI), is the only means of getting any kind of success rate. However, as the club lamb industry continues to expand there is an increased interest from veterinarians - especially the younger veterinarians - to do the AI and embryo transfer work.

There is a club lamb producer, located about 30 miles from us here in Indiana that built a facility on his farm to use only for AI work. It has been in operation for 3 years and Dr.

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Thompson goes to his facility several times a year and AI'S a number of ewes. His breeding schedule is always filled up, way in advance. They are inseminating both club lamb-type ewes and breeding-type ewes. A producer can purchase semen there or they have the option of purchasing semen from someone else and bringing it in. The operation appears to be working and the interest just keeps growing.

COULD ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION WORK FOR THE TEXEL BREED?

There are a lot of questions surrounding artificial insemination and what impact it could have on a breed like Texels. For example:

- If some of the top Texel rams here in the US were collected and the semen sold - at a reasonable price - would it be an asset to the Texel breed?
- Would some Texel breeders be more inclined to import semen from some of the top rams from other countries, where Texels have been raised in large numbers and excel in quality and production to those here in the US, if Texel breeding animals would bring higher prices?
- Would it create more, very top end, stud rams in the US?
- Is there a feeling that the Texels are going to have to bring higher prices for good breeding stock, to get new, knowledgeable, breeders to come in, or even for some of the older breeders to stay in?
- Is it going to take higher prices for someone to take an aggressive approach to improving the overall quality of the Texels available in the US, by AI?

Based on the article in the last issue of the Texel Times about Texel breeders who have attempted to bring in semen from abroad, there is very little AI work being done by Texel breeders here in the US. Are they receiving the kind of prices, and being able to sell the quantity of rams & ewes, to make it enticing to expand or continue their programs? If good breeding stock would bring higher prices would that entice good, experienced breeders, of

other breeds, to add Texels to their present operations?

If the success rate of conception through AI goes up, more semen becomes available at reasonable prices, and the prices for good, sound, breeding stock would go up, why would it not be a good means of increasing the numbers of Texels and increasing the number of Texel breeders?

Progressive Genetics' fee for semen is priced at \$350 per straw, plus the ewe preparation charge of approximately \$40 and the insemination cost of \$30 to \$37. Presently conception rates are a major consideration. The conception rate by use of fresh semen has been as high as 90% but the conception rate on frozen semen is more in the 50% to 60% range. The offspring from the breeding, for club lambs, is going to sell at a much higher price than any Texel breeding stock. Consequently Texel semen would have to be affordable and at the same time be profitable for a breeder to pay top money for outstanding stud rams and after the collection expenses receive a reasonable return. The big question is "how many outstanding Texel stud rams are there, presently, in the US, that are of high enough quality, that if their semen was used on outstanding Texel ewes, the offspring could be expected to be superior, breed-improving Texels?"

The close availability of experienced technicians is always going to be a problem until there are more experienced technicians available. If more technicians become available, more top quality Texel breeding stock becomes available, new breeders come in, and the prices go up for more breeding stock, then why would it not be an asset to the Texel breed? When one studies the number of registrations of the various breeds it becomes obvious that AI and embryo transfer has increased the quality, the numbers and the prices of some of the newer breeds, such as the Dorpers, dramatically. The owner of Progressive Genetics thinks his business model will work. Go to his website, www.progressivegenetics.com, and take a look at what he is doing.

Get to Know a Texel Breeder

Profile written by Bob Adams

No stranger to the National Show and Sale, **Ron Erdman** has made his mark on the Texel breed.



Ron Erdman, (on right) receiving the award for Champion Ram at the 2007 National Show and Sale

This issue's featured breeder is the quiet man from Polo, Illinois, **Ron Erdman**. Not only is he quiet but he is very smart, intellectually, has an uncanny sense of humor. He also has a vast knowledge of the Texels and their background. Many of us can remember his traveling partner to the National Show & Sale for a number of years. It was his little, beloved dog that rode along with him until the dog passed away just a few years ago.

Ron grew up on a farm, near Elkhorn, Wisconsin. He attended the University of Wisconsin. After graduating he took a job working for a livestock sales company. He worked there for 4 years and then moved on to selling feed for 10 years. From there he taught in an elementary school for 25 years before retiring.

While teaching, he raised purebred Hampshire hogs. He sold 25 to 30 purebred Hampshire boars a year. In

1990 he started his movement into raising sheep. As the original flock that US MARC had brought into the US was released out of quarantine, they began to offer a few rams for sale. Gary Onan, who Ron had met when going to the University of Wisconsin, purchased one of the original rams that was sold. In 1992 Ron purchased a $\frac{3}{4}$ Texel ram from Gary. At that time Ron's flock was made up of mostly Southdowns and some Montadales. In 1995 he was able to purchase a purebred Texel ram and then he started his upgrade program. When the University of Wisconsin dispersed their Texel flock Ron was able to purchase a number of their ewes. Ron attended the 1997 National Texel Show and Sale in Sedalia. There he purchased the National Champion Texel Ram that was shown by Gary Testroete. The first National Show and Sale that he brought sheep to show and sell, was in 1999 or 2000 at Springfield, Ill. He brought two very popular yearling rams.

Both rams were AI rams of totally different genetics and there was a lot of interest in the rams. Ron Lugenbill, Eastern Texels, purchased both rams in the \$2000 range. From then on Ron has not missed a National Show & Sale. His consignments have always been very much in demand. At the 2007 National Show he showed the National Champion Ram and he bid on a young ram that was very popular. The ram was shown by Rachel Gately and brought \$3000 but Ron didn't get him. Since that time he has bought some rams at private treaty that have had a strong influence on his flock.

He was one of the very early Texel breeders to use artificial insemination. He was involved early in importing semen from the UK, through Dr. Gourley, from Iowa. At that time Dr. Gourley was artificially inseminating a lot of sheep on a national basis. Ron's first round of artificially inseminating ewes

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was very successful He inseminated 28 ewes and they all settled. He was never able to get that kind of percentage again. He feels that the preparation of the ewes before breeding is highly critical. He had to change veterinarians and the next veterinarian did not have the experience that Dr. Gourley had and his success rate dropped. Ron eventually went back to natural breeding. However he still has six units of the original

semen that he purchased.

He presently lambs out 30 to 40 Texel ewes and in the past he lambed out around 60 head. His lambing starts around the first of March when most of the cold weather is over.

Ron has traveled extensively to some of the heavily populated sheep countries that have large numbers of Texels. He has a very good eye for livestock, and with exceptional

knowledge, he can discuss the differences in the Texels that he saw in

the UK and what he saw in New Zealand. In his opinion the Texels, in New Zealand, have more frame and constitution than the ones in the UK. Their heads are a little different as most of the UK Texels have the Dutch type head, more square and with a short face, as many of the US breeders prefer. He also thinks that the reason that the UK Texels are somewhat smaller, in their make up, is that in the UK the lambs are sold at a much lighter weight than in New

Zealand. The UK sells more in the 60 pound and under range. In the UK they are on a strictly grass program, with salt or mineral, as no grain is fed.

Ron has served two terms on the Texel Sheep Breeders Society Board and is eligible to run again this year. It is not his intention of running again but he has thoroughly enjoyed his years of serving with the other Texel breeders. As he is 79 years old he said, "that I am having less and less desire to go to the barn to take care of the sheep." Whenever he decides to quit raising Texels, which is hopefully not soon, he can feel good about the impact that he has had on the Texel breed and the many friends that he has made.

Ron is one of the few breeders that are still left that got their start from some of the original Texels brought in to the US by US MARC. When Ron does decide to retire from raising Texels, he and his sheep will be missed. Ron developed one of the top Texel flocks in the US. He is an asset to the Texel Breed and he has been very instrumental in sharing his knowledge and improving the breed - in his own quiet manner.



Erdman's Champion Ram Lamb from 2008.

At right: Erdman's 1997 National Champion Texel Ram.



Texels: Consider the Wool Possibilities

By Laura Dixon, Taj Mahal Farm, Orbinsonia, Pa

When people think about Texel sheep they automatically think lean muscle. That is very true, but this versatile breed also has a fleece that is very appealing for many reasons.

The fleece of a Texel is considered to be a medium wool. Since Texels do not have leg and face wool, this makes them a dream to shear. The shearing produces a very desirable fleece weighing 4-7 pounds with little skirting. Length is not an issue -- Texels

easily produce a 4 to 5 inch fleece over a 10 to 12 month period. They have enhanced the fleece when crossed with Dorset, Shropshire or Rambouillet. When crossed, the Texel genetics helped create thick, meaty lambs and the fleeces had more spring, loftiness and length while still maintaining the dense fleece of a Dorset or Shropshire and the fineness of a Rambouillet.

The wool fiber from the Texels has minimal lanolin, is winter white in color and is great

to handle for spinners. The wool has a "spring" to the fiber, making it easy to spin even for the beginner. Texel wool wet felts well and can be used for needle felting too. It easily takes natural and acid dyes.



The possibilities are endless. Spinners and felters would love to work with this beautiful fiber. Hats, scarves, purses, batting, blankets and craft items are a good fit for Texel wool.

Next shearing day think twice before you discard that fleece. It may be one more source of income.

Welcome to the 2012 National Show and Sale!

By Kristin Pike

The 2012 National Show and Sale for the Texel Sheep Breeders Society (TSBS), will kick off Monday, June 25th, with the showing of dozens of Texels from around the country.

The annual National Show, an event Texel breeders have been participating in since the late 1990s, is the capstone event for TSBS.

Breeders come from across the US to show and sell their finest new stock. While approximately 10 breeders are registered to show at this year's event, the number of attendees has been growing every year, says Texel Society secretary, Niki Fisher.

Monday's itinerary includes both the junior and national shows. Monday evening will be TSBS's annual banquet with special presentations and the swearing-in of the new board. The winners of the photo contest will also be announced. "It's just kind of fun. It's a nice time to relax and visit -- and talk about sheep!" Fisher says.

On Tuesday, June 26th, measuring and weighing and loin scans will be taking place in preparation for the big sale, Wednesday, June 27th at 2pm. Last year, Fisher estimates there were 20 buyers, with about 50 people in the stands, watching and bidding. For the third year in a row, people can watch the sale and bid through the Internet. A catalog of the Texels for sale can be found at www.midwestramsale.com. If you want to watch the sale or make a bid, go to www.DVauction.com for more information. Bidding can also be taken over the phone. If you need help arranging a ring man, please contact Larry Mead.

Fisher encourages all members of the Texel Society to make the trip to Sedalia, Missouri for the National Show and Sale. She says it can be intimidating showing your sheep for the first time, but says it's a wonderful way to learn how to improve your flock and to see what other breeders are doing. The Fishers, from Oregon, first made the 3-½ day journey across country to participate in the show four years ago. Fisher says it is a worthwhile journey just to experience a large, national show with multiple different breeds of sheep. The Missouri Fairgrounds hosts multiple other breed shows at the same time. "All shapes, sizes, colors – you name it, it's there," Fisher says. "It's absolutely fascinating."