

Texel Times

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Photograph is taken from the Texel Sheep Breeders Association website:
www.usatexels.org

A closer look at Texels

The Texel has long been known as “the breed with remarkable muscle development.” But today the science and technology of genetics is helping us understand why the Texel is special from a cellular level.

The secret to what makes a Texel unique and why their muscles develop so rapidly is a mutation to the Myostatin gene. Learning more about this mutation and its affects on Texels is critical to understanding this specialty breed. It may also be the foundation of an excellent marketing campaign to highlight the superior quality of Texel meat.

Please read more about the Myostatin gene in this issue of the Texel Times.

I am always ready to accept your ideas, articles and other submissions for our newsletter.

To submit pictures or articles, please contact me at breslaufarms@gmail.com.

Sincerely -- Kristin Pike

In this Issue ...

Pg. 2 -3 Understanding the Myostatin gene

Pg. 3 Genetics problems of the past

Pg. 5 Texel success at state fairs

THE MYOSTATIN GENE

THE TEXEL EDGE

By Bob Adams

A significant transition is currently taking place in the lamb market, shifting from the traditional to non-traditional method of selling market lambs. Many sheep farmers are selling their lambs by having them butchered and then selling the meat direct to the consumers through farmers markets, hotels, restaurants, grocery stores and other venues. Or they may sell their live lambs to someone else that has the lambs butchered and they sell the meat direct to the consumer, by-passing the normal retail outlet. This trend seems to be particularly strong east of the Mississippi River where the towns and cities are close together and are heavily influenced by the ethnic market. Also in warm weather states and places where the live market lambs are sold at a lighter live weight the non-traditional market is an advantage. In the scenario of selling "direct to the consumer" by-passing the traditional market, the Texels have a natural advantage that needs to be explained to ram buyers and prospects.

The Texels have an advantage over other breeds that has been proven by extensive research. It is called the specific Myostatin gene. According to Dr. Kreg Lemaster, USDA sheep research scientist at US Marc, the Texel carries a specific form of the Myostatin gene that other sheep breeds do not have. What a selling point, we as

Texel breeders have, if we have the knowledge and the ability to communicate to our buyers the value of the specific Myostatin gene in the end product. However, we as breeders must educate ourselves to be competent to explain the advantage to prospective clients. I have found that the Myostatin gene has very little influence in the sale of Texel rams if I just say "the Texel carries the Myostatin gene." Most people have no or very little knowledge of the Myostatin gene and its effect on the meat quality of lamb or the increase in the cut-out percentage.

Dr. Leymaster gave me the following information: "Just for clarification purposes, all breeds of sheep have the Myostatin gene, as do other animals, including humans. There are different forms of the gene (alleles) and the Texel has a specific form that leads to increased muscling and tenderness of the meat. The frequency of this form is very high in Texels, at least 90%. We would expect roughly 81% of the Texels to have 2 copies of the specific form, 18% to have 1 copy, and only about 1% to have no copies. Any breed with Texel contributions would be expected to have some form of the Myostatin gene." The specific Myostatin gene is what causes the heavy muscling found in the Texel to be tender and very desirable. Research has shown that lambs sired by a Texel ram, carrying two copies of the specific form of the Myostatin gene, can

have up to 10% more leg muscle and 10% less fat, than lambs sired by a ram without the specific Myostatin gene.

If your ram buyer is associated with the non-traditional market in any form, he/she needs to be informed of how important and valuable the specific Myostatin gene is to them. As they become aware of what it does, backed up by research, then they can confidently pass this information on to their customers. And that can mean repeat buyers. The only way the other breeds can get the specific form of the Myostatin gene is by crossing with a Texel. And then the percentage will be lower.

The strongest market for Texel rams is where the prospective ram buyer is aware of the effect of the specific Myostatin gene on the end product. When the meat is sold directly to the consumers it is obvious that they will be the final monitor of the results either by being repeat customers or not returning to buy again. We must all keep in mind how it benefits the customer whether it is the ram buyer or the end product consumer.

We must always keep in mind that the more Texel rams that each of us sell, the more the public is going to become aware of the superiority of the Texel meat. East of the Mississippi river and in the warm weather states, but not

-Continued from Pg 2

limited to those markets only, where direct selling to the consumer is expanding, Texels truly have an advantage over the other breeds in cut-out percentage, muscling, tenderness and quality of the meat. The specific Myostatin gene, in my opinion, for the non-traditional market, is the edge that the Texels have over the other breeds.

THE TEXEL ADVANTAGE: A Q&A EXAMPLE

Educating buyers about the specific Myostatin gene and how it makes Texels a superior meat choice for lamb is critical in capitalizing on the Texel's natural advantage. Here is a mock Q&A with a prospective ram buyer to help give you some pointers on how to talk about the Myostatin advantage:

RAM BUYER: I am interested in raising lambs to butcher and to sell the meat directly to restaurants, butcher shops, farmers markets and individual consumers. Would you recommend that I use pure Texel rams or crossbred Texel rams? I have around 30 head of commercial Katahdin ewes.

Continued on Pg 4

GENETICS PROBLEMS OF THE PAST

When, we, Adams Texels, first started displaying our Texels at a couple of state fairs in the late 1990's we continually got the comment: "the Texels are double muscled." We knew that the comment came from an issue that arose in the swine industry in the mid 1960's and continued into the mid 1980's. It is believed that the importation of a breed of hogs from Europe, that were very heavily muscled, created a problem with the meat being very tough and of poor quality. The genetics in those double-muscled hogs also caused a stress syndrome, called Post Stress Syndrome, or PSS. When an animal with PSS would get excited it would go into shock and some would drop over dead in the loading chute. Those hogs were referred to as "being wound too tight." Many sheep breeders today are still aware of the swine double muscling problem. It came from the importation from Europe, into the USA, by the swine show industry, to get more muscling into the show animals. In the 1960's there was virtually no artificial insemination of sows in the USA. The hog production was largely from small producers and they purchased their boars from purebred breeders. Most all hog purebred breeders exhibited at county and state fairs and held production sales in the fall. As PSS moved through the purebred hog show industry it spread throughout the commercial swine industry. It took almost 20 years to get the PSS out of the swine industry. Many sheep people today remember those "double muscled" hogs and will try to tie the heavy muscled Texel sheep to the PSS syndrome. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The Texel has a more compact carcass with a shorter, thicker muscle and less fat than most other sheep breeds. That is the characteristic of the specific form of the Myostatin gene that the Texel carries. There is a commercial test available for testing for the specific form of the Myostatin gene through one of the commercial testing laboratories.

Another genetic quality that many people tie to the Texels is the Callipyge gene which can cause extreme toughness of the meat. Lambs carrying the Callipyge gene have extreme muscling and can have beautiful hind quarters that resemble the Texel. However it is important to understand that the Texel is not influenced by the Callipyge gene. The Callipyge gene has some good points but the toughness of the meat far outweighs any good points. It is recommended that rams and ewes carrying the Callipyge gene be sent to market and not be retained as breeding stock. A few years ago I attended the Howard Wyman Leadership School held at Ohio State

Continued on Pg 4

Pg. 3

University. They lined up 8 market lambs that we were to evaluate and score. One lamb carried the Callipyge gene. He was a beautiful lamb and would have made a great market show wether. After we evaluated them they butchered all eight lambs and then cooked them. The meat for the lamb carrying the Callipyge gene was so tough it was like chewing on rubber. One of the men, in the OSU sheep department, allowed me to see the stud ram that carried the Callipyge gene and was the sire of the market lamb. The stud ram resembled a heavy muscled Texel ram but he was not. US Marc had actually created the stud ram for OSU. A Texel ram, that did not carry the Callipyge gene, was used on some ewes of another breed that did carry the Callipyge gene, and through several generations of breeding, they were able to create the ram that resembled a Texel but carried a heavy influence of the Callipyge gene. He was then bred to a Hampshire ewe to get the market lamb with the heavy Callipyge gene influence.

Texel Seller: You are looking at four different segments of the market. The meat requirements by the customers can be similar or quite different. You need to define the market that would best fit your present operation. That would help in recommending what ram would best fit your needs. For instance, selling to restaurants where they may want a larger cut, may require a live weight lamb in the 150- to 160-lb. weight range. It might be in your best interest to use a crossbred Texel/black face ram. That will give you more rapid growth and larger cuts. If you are going to sell on the ethnic market then you should consider using a pure Texel ram. Most likely you will butcher your lambs in the 60- to 110-lb. weight. By starting a new venture it might be best to select one market and concentrate on it until you become familiar with selling direct to the consumer market. You might want to consider starting by selling initially at farmers markets. By your maternal line being Katahdins you will need more muscling to get added value to your product and to get repeat customers. The pure Texel ram is your best bet for the farmer's market.

BUYER: Why do you feel that it would be in my best interest to use a pure Texel or a crossbred Texel ram?

SELLER: The Texel breed carries a gene that is called a specific Myostatin gene. No other breed of sheep carries that specific Myostatin gene. Research has proven that it can raise the leg score by 10% and at the same time reduce the fat by 10%. It improves the quality and that means repeat buyers. Repeat buyers puts your name out there as the one that sells the Texel meat. That means added value and added profit to you. I can direct you to where you can get more information on the specific Myostatin gene that the Texels carry.

BUYER: Are there drawbacks to using the heavy muscled Texel ram or the heavy muscled Texel cross rams?

SELLER: If you are breeding a heavy muscled Texel ram to a heavy muscled ewe you may encounter some birthing difficulties. Close management can resolve that problem. You will need to break the gestation period into trimesters. Your feeding management will be different in the various trimesters. You will need to learn to body score your ewes and meet the ewe's various nutritional needs at specific stages in the gestation period. Watch closely your feeding management throughout the gestation period. Using Texel rams on the Katahdin ewes you should not have any problems. If you retain ewe lambs from the first cross for replacements in the future, you will recognize the added value of the Texel rams as time goes on. **Good Luck!**

Texel Breeders take top honors

By Niki Fisher

While flipping through the Oct/Nov 2014 issue of THE BANNER magazine and perusing the various fair results, some names jumped out at me. I would like to say congratulations to all of those Texel breeders that did so well at various fairs around the country. Even though we are a small sheep association, these results show that Texels are beginning to be noticed across the United States.

North Dakota

July 18-26, 2014

Champion Ram - Sarah Hatlewick

Reserve Champion Ram - Tim Herman

Champion Ewe - Sarah Hatlewick

Reserve Champion Ewe - Tim Herman

Indiana

August 1-17, 2014

Champion Ram - Michael Bokelman

Reserve Champion Ram - Bob Adams

Champion Ewe - Michael Bokelman

Reserve Champion Ewe - Michael Bokelman

Others showing Texels in Indiana and who also placed in the various classes were:

Allen & Batlo; Thomas Farms; Mallorie Jennings and Sarah Mann.

Oregon State Fair

August 23-September 2, 2014

Competing in All Other Breeds-Meat:

Reserve Champion Ram - Troy & Loren Heath

Reserve Champion Ewe - Troy & Loren Heath

Troy & Loren also placed in several other classes in this category.

Minnesota State Fair

August 21-September 1, 2014

Amy Marquette placed in the following: Yearling Ram, January Ram Lamb, February Ram Lamb, Spring Ram Lamb, January Ewe Lamb, Pair of January Ram Lambs, Pair of February Ram Lambs, Pair of Spring Ram Lambs, Pair of Yearling Ewes, Pair of January Ewe Lambs, Pair of February Ewe Lambs, Pair of Spring Ewe Lambs and Breeder's Group Classes.

Eastern States Exposition "The Big E"

September 12-28, 2014

Connecticut breeder, Rachael Gately, placed in the All Other Meat Breed Class in the following categories: Junior Ram Lambs, Yearling Ewes, Pair of Yearling Ewes, Junior Ewe Lambs, Pair of Ewe Lambs, Exhibitor's Flock and Breeder's Flock.

Wisconsin Sheep and Wool Festival

September 5-7, 2014

Champion Ewe - Austin Retzlaff

Reserve Champion Ewe - Crystal Retzlaff



Pictured at left: Troy and Loren Heath at the Oregon State Fair with their Reserve Champion Ram and Ewe.