

Do You Have A Plan For Marketing Your Lambs?

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All sheep operations need to market products in order to generate income. To be successful and prosperous in your sheep enterprise, you should understand basic marketing concepts for selling sheep and their products. This includes specific business models of marketing lamb for the holidays, marketing lambs at other times of the year, marketing breeding stock, and marketing wool and woolen products. As a sheep producer, what sort of plan do you have for marketing your lambs?

One of the first steps to consider when starting any business is to develop a detailed marketing plan. This plan will serve as a blueprint for your business and covers everything from how you will go about targeting your customers, to calculating profitable prices.

Simply put, a marketing plan lays out your strategy to achieve your business goals and objectives. More precisely, it is a clear and detailed "map" for how you will sell your lambs or their products to your customer. Your marketing plan specifies how you will handle certain tasks such as: getting your lambs to market, building a market niche, identifying your customer base, maintaining sales growth, or dealing with future changes to your operation.

Your plan also serves as a useful means of accumulating valuable data and gauging day-to-day tasks and events. For instance, you might use your plan as a template for marketing tasks that occur throughout the

year. In addition, the marketing plan might note when you need to attend to specific activities, such as registering sheep, sending performance data to the National Sheep Improvement Program (NSIP), or setting up a processing schedule so that you have adequate inventory of lamb for festival markets.

To prepare your marketing plan, you will need to start with a basic concept for the plan: position.

Positioning involves influencing how your customers perceive your business and your product. It creates your unique farm identity or puts your lambs or lamb products in people's minds. In turn, when con-

sumers are interested in buying sheep or lamb products, they will think specifically of your farm or unique brand.

A brand or branding is the marketing practice of creating a name, symbol, or design that identifies and differentiates a product from other products. For this reason, your brand is important—it is what distinguishes your products or services from those of your competitors. It also helps keep your customers focused on your image and helps maintain and grow your sales.

As a sheep producer, there are some strategies that you can employ that will help ensure good positioning and branding, or that "customer allure", to entice sales. For instance, you could:

- Develop a farm name and logo that serves to identify your product or products
- Sell pasture-raised, or grass-fed, lamb for a unique taste and quality
- Offer organic lamb
- Highlight your production practices as a selling point
- Identify genetic and/or visual characteristics that appeal to buyers interested in breeding stock
- Highlight wool characteristics that appeal to hand spinners

Identify the unique aspects that differentiate your



A marketing plan can include information on sheep genetics to position the farm for breeding stock sales.

product from other sheep or lamb products. For instance, you might want to identify genetic merits of your sheep through NSIP to identify outstanding estimated breeding values (EBVs) in order to sell breeding stock. Alternatively, if you elect to market lamb, you could use any unique attributes to distinguish your product from your competitors' lamb products. Remember, your buyers want to feel confident that your

product is superior and consistent, and you will have an excellent market position.

Spending a few minutes developing a marketing plan can keep you on track to develop sheep that best meet your customers needs and that also best use resources available on your farm. By keeping your standards high and offering a quality product, you're sure to have loyal buyers who will spread the word about your farm and the products you offer for sale.

For more information on marketing lambs or lamb products, contact Melanie Barkley at the Penn State Extension office in Bedford County at 814-623-4800 or by email at meh7@psu.edu.