

Youth Programs Committee

Mid-year Report

September 9, 2003

During the 2003 NIAA Leaders Forum, the following report was given:

Show Lamb Tail Docking

The main focus of the committee this year is the short tail docking issue in the show lamb industry. A major support item for the committee in addressing this issue has emerged in the way of the first research article to be published in a scientific, peer-reviewed journal being accepted by the Journal of Animal Science. Dr. Dave Thomas of the University of Wisconsin conducted a study of "Length of docked tail and incidence of rectal prolapse in lambs" in 2000. There were 1,227 lambs in the study in 5 states which were assigned into three treatment groups, 1) short tailed was removed as close to the body as possible, 2) Mid-web – halfway between the body and the distal end of the caudal fold, and 3) long – docked at the distal end of the caudal fold. Prolapse rate for the three groups were as follows: short – 7.8%, mid-web – 4.0%, and long – 1.8%. short and mid-web locations were significantly different than the long docked group. The authors strongly recommend the docking of all lambs at the distal end of the caudal fold. This paper was accepted for publishing in July 2003 with 5-6 month window to follow for expected "in-print" date.

The second major effort of the committee regarding this issue has been support of a national study to 1) establish an objective method to measure tail length, and 2) describe a population of lambs that have been docked at the distal end of the caudal fold in terms of a linear measurement, and 3) set a national standard for a minimum length tail of an appropriately docked lamb. There are over 1,000 lambs currently in the study in 5 states, which were all docked at the distal end of the caudal fold. These lambs are being measured at docking, weaning, and market ready time frames to access how the measurement with the proposed device might vary through the life of the lamb. This data will be useful in establishment of a national standard and could be utilized by states and livestock shows to establish an enforceable local standard that is consistent across county and state lines. Final data collection is scheduled to be completed in November of 2003 with the national recommendation to be made soon afterward. 2004 will be an educational year for the proposed standard with states and shows being able to adopt the standard for enforcement in 2005.

The aim of this committee is to provide sound, research-based information with which states and shows can base their enforcement and educational efforts related to this issue. It is important to note that this issue is about more than the incidence of rectal prolapse in show lambs. It gets to the heart of the manipulation of show animals by jocks and breeders to meet a visually perfect animal. The successful implementation of the recommendations to be made by the current 5 state lamb docking study could mark the start of a "sea change" in how youth livestock shows are implemented in this country.

Update of Web Accessible Educational Materials

This fall, committee members will be focusing their efforts on enhancing the youth livestock show related educational materials available online at the NIAA website.

Dr. Jeff Goodwin ,Chair

Jodi Black, Vice Chair