Veterinary Services
Centers for Epidemiology and Animal Health
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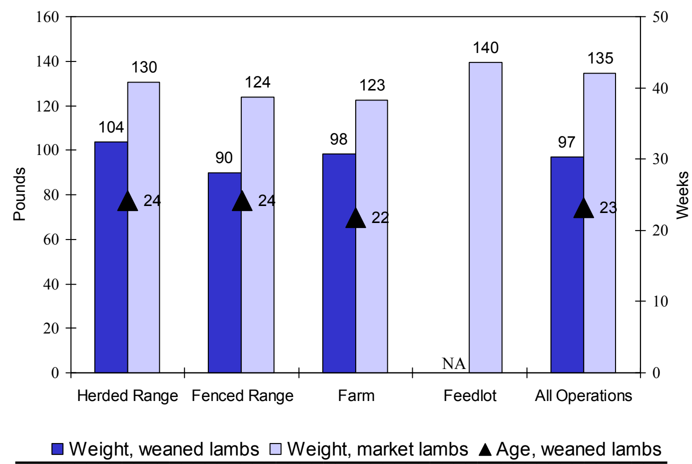
Lamb Marketing Patterns in the United States, 2000

An understanding of marketing patterns for animals and animal products can be critical to the development of effective disease control strategies, particularly in emergency situations. Lamb marketing practices were examined in the the National Animal Health Monitoring System's (NAHMS) second national sheep study, Sheep 2001.

The USDA's National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) collected data on sheep health and management practices from a stratified random sample of sheep production sites in 22 States[1] as part of the Sheep 2001 study. These sites represented 87.4 percent of the January 1, 2001, U.S. sheep inventory and 72.3 percent of U.S. sheep producers. Overall, 3,210 operations participated in the first interview from December 29, 2000, to January 26, 2001.

Figure 1. Average Age and Weight of Lambs at Sale During 2000.



Weaned Lamb Age and Weight at Sale

Weaned lambs were sold at an average age of 23 weeks and an average weight of 97 pounds (Figure 1). Half of the weaned lambs were sold between 20 and 26 weeks of age, while one-fourth were sold prior to 20 weeks and one-fourth after 26 weeks. Forty-five percent of weaned lambs were sold at weights greater than or equal to 100 pounds.

Weaned lambs from herded and fenced range flocks were, on average, 2 weeks older at sale than weaned lambs from farm flocks. Weaned lambs from herded range flocks averaged the greatest weight at sale (104 pounds), while weaned lambs from farm flocks and fenced range flocks averaged 98 pounds and 90 pounds, respectively. Nationally, weaned lambs averaged 38 pounds less at sale than market lambs.

Quarterly Weaned Lamb Sales

The seasonal, quarterly pattern of weaned lamb sales in 2000 for all operations showed that 4 percent of weaned lambs were sold from January through March; 22 percent from April through June; 43 percent from July through September; and 31 percent from October through December (Figure 2).

[1] Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming.

Figure 2. Percentage of Weaned Lamb Sales During 2000, by Quarter.

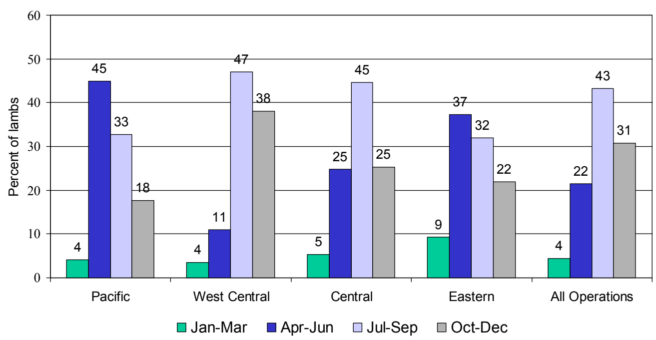
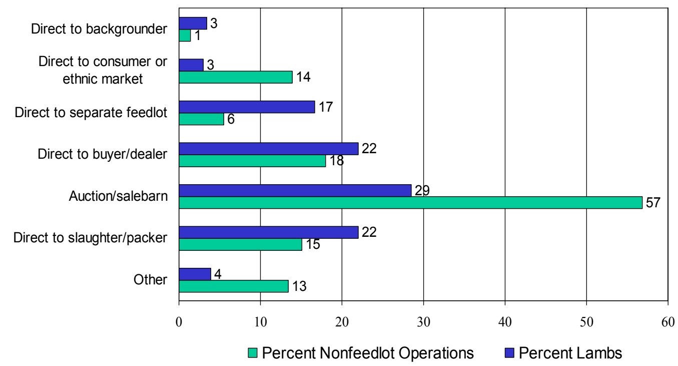


Figure 3. Percentage of Lambs and Percentage of Nonfeedlot Operations, by Marketing Channels Used During 2000.



The seasonal pattern for all operations also held for the West Central and Central regions[2]. For the Pacific and Eastern regions, weaned lamb sales were highest in the April through June quarter, followed by the July through September quarter.

Marketing Channels

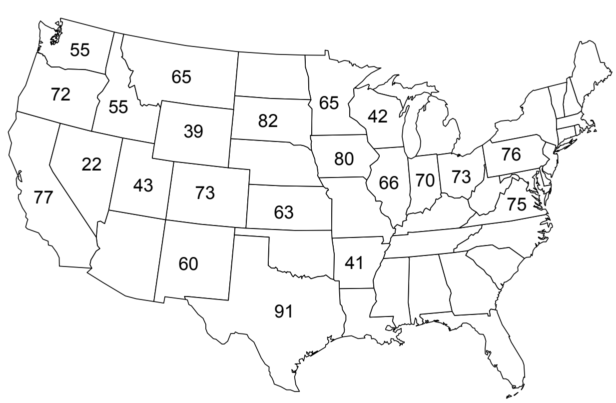
Lambs from nonfeedlot operations traveled through a wide variety of marketing channels (Figure 3). Sales to auction markets and salebarns accounted for 29 percent of lambs sold. Sales directly to slaughter/packer entities and direct sales to buyers/dealers each accounted for 22 percent of lambs sold. While 17 percent of lambs sold went directly to a feedlot separate from the original operation, consumer or ethnic markets, backgrounders, and all others each purchased approximately 4 percent of lambs sold. In contrast, 95 percent of lambs sold by feedlot operations went directly to slaughter/packers.

The pattern of lambs marketed by nonfeedlot operations contrasts greatly with the percentage of operations selling through these channels. The largest percentage of operations (57 percent) sold through auction markets and salebarns, followed by: direct sales to buyers/dealers (18 percent); direct sales to slaughter/packers (15 percent); and direct sales to consumer or ethnic markets (14 percent).

Lamb Movement

Producers on nonfeedlot operations were asked to list the top three States they marketed their sheep to. For 17 of the participating States, the majority of responses were “the home State.” Figure 4 shows response percentages for each home State. For example, in California 77 percent of producer responses indicated that California was a top marketing State. However, in Nevada only 22 percent of responses indicated Nevada as a top marketing State.

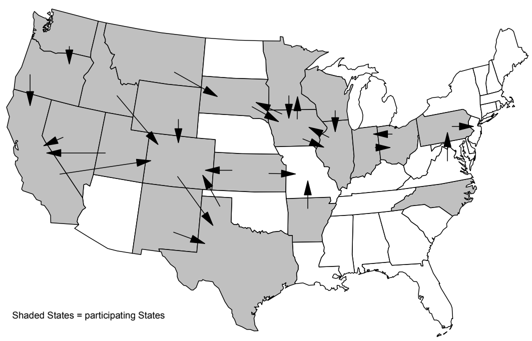
Figure 4. Percentage of Producer Responses Indicating the Home State as a Primary Market.



[2]**Regions**
Pacific: California, Oregon, Washington
West Central: Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico Nevada, Utah, Texas, Wyoming
Central: Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, South Dakota, Wisconsin
Eastern: Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia

Figure 5 indicates, with arrows, producers' responses as to the States of greatest marketing importance, other than the home State. For example, California producers' responses indicated that Colorado was second in importance. Responses from some States, such as Iowa, indicated that more than one State ranked second in importance. In Iowa's case, equal numbers of responses were given for South Dakota, Minnesota, and Illinois.

Figure 5. Markets Beyond the Home State Indicated as Primary by Producers.



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