ISU Sheep Teaching Farm
South State Avenue, Ames, Iowa

Scott Smalley, superintendent
Animal Science Sheep Teaching Unit

Mission

Provide facilities, livestock, and instruction for undergraduate education, and extension outreach programs, on sheep production, and flock management.

History

The Iowa State University Sheep Teaching Farm is one that is steeped in tradition and excellence. Iowa State University has been exhibiting sheep at the highest levels of competition since the very beginnings of livestock shows in the United States. Iowa State College's interest in sheep production dates back to the early 1900's when the college exhibited Oxford and Southdown wethers at the 1912 International Livestock Exposition in Chicago, Ill. The farm still continues to raise productive, competitive breeding stock today.

An early judging class at Iowa State College

This building was headquarters for the sheep farm until 1965 when the farm was relocated to its current site on South State Street Avenue.

Farm Area and land use

The farm is currently being transitioned into more of a rotational cropping system in an attempt to keep soil phosphorous levels down, and increase productivity per acre. The rotation consists of corn/soybean production, hays stands consisting of an alfalfa brome and bluegrass mixture, and pastures of that same composition. In the previous 35 years pastures and hay fields were much more static resulting in eventual losses in both productivity and grass and legume species diversity in pastures.

Facilities

Facilities consist of three buildings. The first building is 30' x 218' and was built in 1966. It has ten 18'x24' pens, two lambing rooms, an office with restroom, and two small storage rooms. The building is mainly used during late gestation and lactation of the winter lambing ewes, and finishing lambs in the summer and fall months. Also in 1966 a 30' x 90' structure was built. It's main purpose is for feeding replacement ewe lambs, and also has two pens where stud rams are housed when not in use. The third and final structure is 32' x 80' and was built in 1956. This building is used mainly in the late fall and winter months when pastures are no longer available. At this sight mature females are housed during the first two trimesters of there pregnancy and during any open periods before breeding and after weaning.

Teaching Activities

The Iowa State University Sheep Teaching Farm plays a critical role in undergraduate education providing hands on interaction with various components of sheep production. The farm aids in the following undergraduate classes both on and off campus.

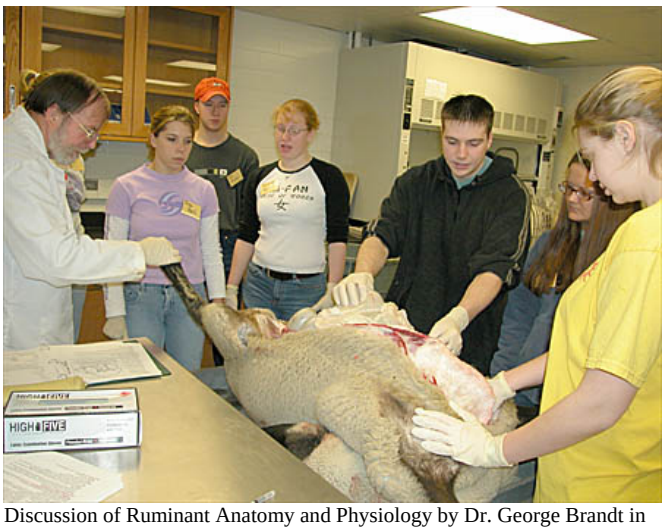
Animal Science 101 L	Working with Animals
Animal Science 214 L	Domestic Animal Physiology Lab
Animal Science 229	Sheep Science
Animal Science 270	Foods of Animal Origin
Animal Science 305	Livestock Evaluation
Animal Science 332	Laboratory Methods in Animal Reproduction
Animal Science 336	Livestock Behavior and Well-Being
Animal Science 429	Sheep Systems Management
Animal Science 475	Intercollegiate Judging Training and Competition

A group of lactating ewes and lambs in early spring.

101 lab students taking a tour of the ISU Sheep Teaching Unit

The farm and its livestock are also used for a variety of events for the Block and Bridle club including Little North American Showmanship Competition, The Junior Livestock Evaluation Competition, The VEISHA petting zoo, and Ag Olympics. Block and Bridle club members also organize and schedule tours of the farm for daycare centers and pre-schools in the area.

In addition to classes, in the last few years the sheep teaching farm has also held several programs and labs for the Iowa State 4-H office, as well as providing judging workouts for 4-H, junior college, and senior college judging teams from across the country.



Discussion of Ruminant Anatomy and Physiology by Dr. George Brandt in Animal Science 214L.

Flock Composition

The farm consists of 250 mature ewes, and comprises of three different production systems. The first is a 110 head commercial white face flock which is mainly comprised of polypay and polypay cross females. This flock is a low input, low labor management system where ewes are moderate to small framed, easy fleshing, durable and prolific. Ewes are fed average to low quality forages during the dry lot period and little or no concentrate. Lambing is done on spring pastures in May on a rotational grazing system. Weaning usually occurs between August 1 and September 1 depending on pasture availability.
The second production system is a 40 head registered Hampshire flock. These ewes are lambed inside in January and February. Moderate frame size, and rapid growth, in combination with desirable phenotype are the selection criteria in the Hampshire flock. Breeding stock are sold off the farm and at state and national sales.

The third and final management system is a flock of 100 wether type Hampshire and suffolk cross ewes, which lamb in January and February. The objectives of this flock are to produce competitive show lambs for sale to junior livestock exhibitors for local, county, state, and national exhibition. Select stud ram prospects and replacement ewe lambs are also sold off the farm and at state and national sales.