

Hardin County Extension News Release

For Further Information Contact:

Mark Badertscher

Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension Educator

Phone – 419-767-6037

E-Mail – badertscher.4@osu.edu

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Statewide Sheep Tour Visits Michigan

by Mark Badertscher-OSU Extension Educator, Hardin County

Hardin County - Fourteen Ohio sheep producers, industry representatives, and an OSU Extension Educator visited five different Michigan Lamb Marketing and Dry Lot/Confinement Sheep Operations the weekend of Saturday, September 30 and Sunday, October 1, 2023. This year's tour was jointly sponsored by the Ohio Sheep Improvement Association and Hardin County OSU Extension. In addition to enjoying the fall color of the trees, producers were able to ask questions of the operators and see these farms as part of this tour in the state of Michigan. Topics included facilities, production, management, and marketing of lamb.

The first farm stop was at Ronnie Berry Halal Meats in Dearborn, Michigan. Ronnie Berry Halal Meats has served the Dearborn, Michigan community for over 60 years. They stock a wide variety of fresh meat weekly including lamb, veal, chicken, and beef. They also smoke their own jerky, beef pepperoni, and lunch meats.

The second stop on the tour was the Eastern Market of Detroit, Michigan. Attending the Saturday Market is an experience that is undeniably Detroit. Over 225 market vendors share their produce and stories with up to 40,000 visitors in one day during their busy season. The tradition of this market has been a cornerstone of the city for 125 years and is crucial to their mission of nourishing a healthier, wealthier, and happier city.

The third stop on the tour was Wheaton Hampshires of Charlotte, Michigan. This farm is an intensive club lamb operation primarily marketing to 4-H and FFA members as well as marketing genetics to other club lamb producers across the country. Primary facilities are confinement/dry lot type buildings due to

extensive artificial insemination, embryo transfer, and ram semen collection programs, although some pasture is utilized during different times of the year. The most unique part of the buildings is a climate-controlled ram barn so that ram semen collections can be done throughout the year.

The second day of the tour featured a stop at the Michigan State University Sheep Teaching and Research Center in Lansing, Michigan. The MSU sheep farm has an accelerated lambing program and modern lambing barn and feeding system running 300 ewes. They utilize a total mixed ration feeding program to provide a quality and low-cost diet. The farm uses natural methods to achieve a high rate of reproductive success with lambing periods every 4 months. The farm's facilities allow it to support applied research projects and the education of both students (undergraduate and veterinary) and producers on modern sheep production practices.

The final stop on the second day was the Dr. Richard Earhardt Family Sheep Farm located in Eaton Rapids, Michigan. The Earhardt Farm has an accelerated lambing program with 200 ewes and practices Management intensive Grazing on 25 acres. The focus is on forage quality and strategic feeding to create the level of reproductive efficiency needed to produce a consistent set of lambs year around. Dr. Richard Earhardt is the Michigan State University Small Ruminant Specialist and has been a speaker at the Buckeye Shepherd's Symposium on multiple occasions.

The Ohio Sheep Improvement Association and Hardin County OSU Extension would like to thank each of the tour hosts for opening their farms up for other Ohio sheep producers to see and learn from their operations. This year the 2023 Buckeye Shepherd's Symposium is being held December 2 at the OARDC Shisler Conference Center in Wooster and will focus on Nutrition and Marketing.

Photo caption: Ohio Sheep producers toured the Michigan State University Sheep Teaching and Research Center in Lansing, Michigan as part of the Statewide Sheep Tour of Michigan the weekend of September 30-October 1, 2023; an event co-sponsored by Hardin County OSU Extension and the Ohio Sheep Improvement Association.