

SHEEP PRODUCERS AND THEIR FLOCKS



Limitations associated with characterizing and quantifying sheep operations in the state of Connecticut present obstacles to communication, community development, and growth opportunities for producers. A survey was conducted from October 2021 to February 2022 in order to gain insight into the status and health of the Connecticut sheep industry and to identify areas of profitability in the state. The survey was distributed virtually and at the annual Connecticut Sheep Breeders Association meeting in December 2021. Sixty-six viable responses were collected and analyzed. The results of this survey will be used by the University of Connecticut and the Connecticut Sheep Breeders Association to establish baselines with regard to producers and sheep and will be valuable in designing and implementing timely programming and resources for Connecticut sheep producers.

- Primary producers ranged from 10 to 79 years of age with an average age of 42.95 years.
- The average number of years working with sheep was 14.67 for primary producers, and sheep-related experience ranged from 1 to 60 years.
- There were 75 secondary producers reported as being associated with respondent operations. The average age of associated producers was 33.6 years with ages ranging from 3 to 95 years.
- 78.3% of respondents identified as female and 21.7% identified as male.
- Operations from all 8 Connecticut counties were represented, with the highest number of reported operations being found in Windham and New London County.
- 91.53% of reported operations were family-run.
- 81.67% of respondents reported having 40 sheep or less included in their operation in the last 12 months.
- 78.2% of respondents reported that their sheep operation contributed 5% or less to their household annual income.
- 74% of respondents sell products or animals from their flocks.
- 31 purebred breeds were represented in responses. 44.64% of reported operations involved conservation breed sheep, including those with watch, threatened, critical, and recovering statuses.
- 71.2% of respondents owned other livestock.
- Producers reported using a wide range of marketing outlets, including Facebook (36.59% of responses), Instagram (18.29% of responses), word of mouth, websites, newsletters, fliers, magazines, and blogs.
- Respondents also reported a variety of outlets for selling their products, including on-farm sale (23.4% of responses), social media (13.83% of responses), farmers markets (9.57% of responses), festivals (9.57% of responses), auctions (8.51% of responses), websites, wholesale, e-commerce companies, farm markets, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs.
- Flock purposes included: show and breeding stock (19.84% of responses), hobby operation (17.46% of responses), just enough meat for family and friends, commercial meat producer, just enough wool for family and friends, commercial raw wool producer, grazing services, commercial processed fiber, non-food products, and just enough dairy for family and friends.
- The average pounds of raw wool produced each year by respondents was 127.3 lbs.
- Reported obstacles faced by Connecticut sheep producers included: (1) costs associated with production and/or processing, land, (2) market for products, (3) lack of sufficient processing capacity, (4) time associated with production and/or processing, (5) predators, (6) parasites, and (7) a lack of support from community, government, and/or other groups and organizations.

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