



Small Ruminant DIVISION



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Farm Bureau Unveils Newest Commodity Division

The Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation added a Small Ruminant Commodity Division as result of policy development in 2022. The new division, the first to be added to Arkansas Farm Bureau in nearly 20 years, met for the first time at the 2023 Winter Commodity meetings in North Little Rock. The group will focus on the current status, needs and growth of the small ruminant industry in Arkansas which primarily includes sheep and goats. John Crangle of Hot Spring County serves as the Division Chair and Dana Stewart of White County serves as the State Board Liaison.

John Crangle is the agricultural education teacher and FFA advisor at Bismarck High School. He and his family are first generation farmers raising cattle, as well as small ruminants for show stock. His passion for agriculture was sparked in high school, and he attributes the foundation of his leadership skills to his time as a state FFA officer.

“My wife and I are first generation farmers and ranchers,” says Crangle. “We started in 2015 just kind of getting into the cattle industry. We grew up through 4-H and FFA teaching us showing animals. Now our oldest daughter shows, and our youngest is right there behind her, and they have definitely taken an interest in the sheep and goat side.”



Crangle’s first student to ever show animals exhibited a goat, and at the time he felt out of his element with his previous show pig experience. Since then, he has continued to coach his students, as well as learn alongside them. Crangle hopes to be an example of the opportunities provided to him as a first generation in agriculture, and his passion to teach the kids in his program drives him to help the industry. He also recognizes the need to help make show animals more accessible to students who otherwise would not get the opportunity.

Dana Stewart is the sixth generation to live and work on her family’s farm. They raise three different pure breeds of cattle. Around five years ago they purchased their first goat for Stewart’s niece to show in livestock exhibits. The family decided to expand and raise goats for FFA and 4-H members to show. Since then, they have slowly been increasing the size of their herd and focusing on producing quality boar goats for show.

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“Through that process as a beef producer, I thought raising goats would be a good compliment,” says Stewart. “It has really proven to me to have its own set of unique challenges.” She says those challenges include anything from parasites to medicine and feed products specifically for goats not being as readily available in the state as they are for beef cattle. Alongside the unique challenges, come the struggles other producers face such as shortage of veterinarians, supply chain issues, and last year’s drought.

Stewart’s intentionality in combining her cattle operation with goat production has set a precedent for multispecies operations.

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“Because sheep and goats take less land and require less inputs, it’s an intriguing way to become involved in the livestock industry,” says Stewart. Whether its first generation, beginning farmer, young farmer or someone looking to expand their operation, Stewart recognizes that small ruminants are a feasible opportunity for many.

The Small Ruminant Division meeting also highlighted the importance of small ruminants as an opportunity for young or beginning farmers to get started in the agriculture industry. With less land use, smaller feed rations, more affordable purchases prices and a growing market.

“Through education, the potential of the small ruminant market could open new doors for people,” says Crangle. He specifically remembers when local beef became a necessity during Covid, and cited a major problem with the amount of time and money it takes to produce a pound of beef.

“When you tell people what it will cost for a quarter or half of beef, even though it’s extremely discounted from the grocery store dollar per pound, the volume with price leaves people shell shocked,” says Crangle. He sees an opportunity for those who live in poverty areas that may not be able to afford fresh beef halves or be able to buy straight from producers. Through education of proper preparation and nutrition, mutton and chevon may be a feasible option as a smaller, faster finishing animal.

“The Winter Division meeting showed us the need for a lot of research,” says Stewart. “So we can develop markets for these animals, promotion dollars, education or creating an interest in these livestock and proteins. We just wanted people to understand this is an option.”

One of the largest needs identified through the recent Small Ruminant Division meeting is assessing the current state of small ruminant production in Arkansas. With a desire to develop research and resources, Crangle and Stewart highly encourage any county Farm Bureaus with interest to develop small ruminant committees that can meet throughout the year. These committees not only allow producer voices to be heard at a state level, but they will also help create a baseline of what the industry currently looks like in the state.

“Of course, we also want producers to attend our commodity meetings,” says Stewart. “We’ll have another in July, of course we are working on policy development, and as a grassroots organization that flows from the ground up for us.



We need to hear from members so we can develop policy that will advocate for them on their farms and ranchers.”

So far 15 counties have developed a small ruminant committee. Crangle pointed out the collaborative work that is currently happening with Cooperative Extension to help grow the industry. Along with the development of the Small Ruminant Division, Arkansas System Division of Agriculture has also appointed a new small ruminant specialist, Dr. Dan Quadros. Dr. Quadros also hopes to develop a collaborative, transparent industry while increasing knowledge and understanding of the small ruminant industry.



“With Farm Bureau, the opportunities are endless,” says Crangle. “Dr. Quadros is basically starting from nothing. It’s going to take all of us to make this possible. Our county Farm Bureau is currently working with extension to assess where we are, but its going to take all of us to collect data, find the true need and grow this industry.”

Crangle and Stewart agree that the actual number of small ruminants and small ruminant producers in the state will surprise everyone. They hope that throughout this first year they will be able to help create that baseline through the Small Ruminant Division, and

encouraging counties to get involved so Arkansas Farm Bureau can better represent its producers. As they look toward the future they see endless opportunities in this industry, whether through meat and dairy products, or wool and hair product.

“I just want people to know that the sheep and goat industry is a really viable part of agriculture in this state,” says Stewart. “Sometimes those producers are looked at like a hobby farm, but we know that those involved in marketing small ruminants can tell you it’s just as important as our large livestock production. This is an industry that needs to be taken seriously and deserves a seat at the table. We’re excited to facilitate that opportunity for our producers.”