Fiber Processing and Marketing Streams for Different Sized Farms in NYS

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Today, we will talk about

• What fleece and wool market opportunities exist in New York State?
• Possible direct-to-consumer and other marketing models that have been successful for fiber farmers.
What types of fleece and wool market opportunities exist in NYS?

• Depends on breed of sheep or other animals;
• Depends on how involved you want to be with your fleece and wool;
• Depends on interests of neighbors for collaboration.
About breeds of sheep and more

• Not all sheep make high quality fleece;
• Which figures most prominently in NYS fiber marketing – micron count, branding/messaging, or other factors?
• Not all wool-breeds of sheep do well (or do well, easily) in New York state;
• Raising sheep for fleece success – feeding methods, coating, shearing schedule, and more.
Overview of various fiber sheep breeds and characteristics of fleece

• Fine wool breeds
• Medium wool breeds
• Long wool breeds

_Fleece and Fiber Sourcebook by Deborah Robson & Carol Ekarius_

https://www.fleeceandfiber.com/
Raising sheep for fleece success

- Feed and feeding methods
- Indoors vs outdoors
- To coat or not to coat – it’s a big commitment
- Shearing schedule – before or after lambing? Depends on wool length, and other factors

“Wool production is a year round process. Environmental conditions including pasture management, facilities, feeding practices and animal health affect wool quality.” Preparation Steps for Wool Quality Improvement, American Sheep Industry Association, Inc.

http://d1cqrq366w3ike.cloudfront.net/http/DOKUMENT/SheepUSA/Wool_Prep_Steps.pdf
Shearing day – what happens then can make or break your fleece quality
Shearing day

• Shearer skill and support
• Put down a piece of plywood
• Keep shearing area clean to avoid contamination
Shearing day

- Skirt before bagging – tags, belly and top knots all come out!
Shearing day

- Packing and labelling can vary by marketing plans
After shearing – now what?

• How involved you want to be with your fleece and wool? Each option progressively brings you more money, but takes more work to prepare

Option 1 – Toss it (or use for mulch)

Option 2 – Sell it in bulk to a wool pool

Option 3 – Sell it fleece by fleece to a commercial buyer/mill

Option 4 – Sort ruthlessly and sell in the grease to hand spinners using advertisements, Etsy, festivals, farm gate and open houses/tours.
Prices vary – it pays to shop around
After shearing – now what?

Option 5 – Have yarn or roving made; and sell wholesale to general store, gift shop, yarn store, or indie dyer. Will need to label.

Option 6 – Have yarn or roving made; and sell retail direct to consumer on-line, on-farm; or at farmers markets and festivals. Will need labels, patterns, Instagram/Facebook, etc.

See Wing and A Prayer Farm
Festivals are big!
After shearing – now what?

Option 7 – Have yarn made; and then have finished goods made to sell retail or wholesale
After shearing – now what?

More products – felted items. EMERGING MARKETS!
Overview of steps in fiber processing

• Sort/open;
• Wash/scour and dry;
• Pick and card
Overview of steps in fiber processing

• WOOLEN OR WORSTED AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?
• Drafting
Overview of steps in fiber processing

• Spinning
• Plying
• Winding
Cones or skeins?
Blending with other natural or synthetic fibers?
Dyed or natural? Dyeing options?
Branding, messaging, networking